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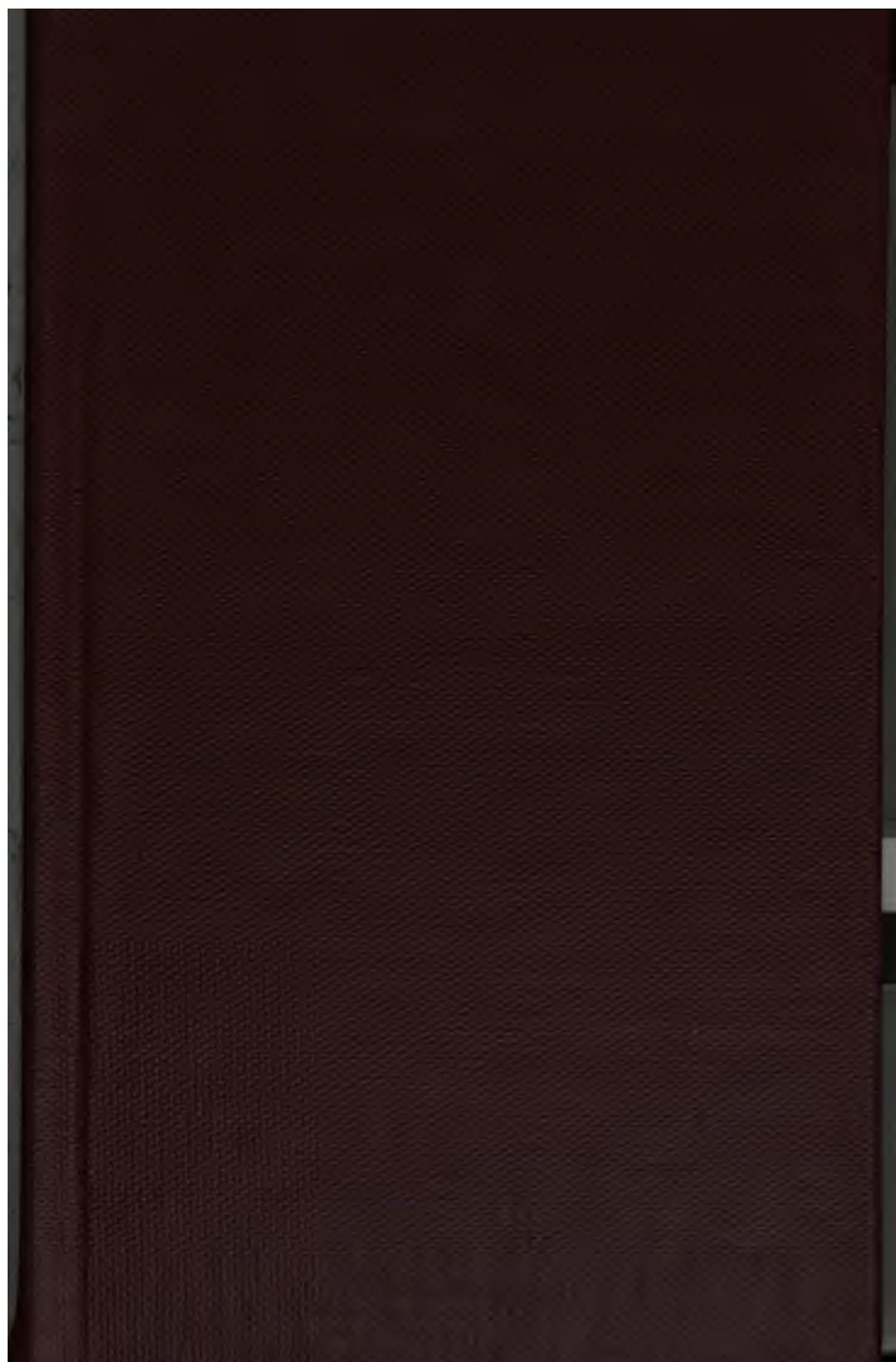
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GRACES AND POWERS
OF THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE.

BY
A. D. MAYO,
MINISTER OF THE INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN SOCIETY,
GLOUCESTER, MASS.

BOSTON:
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TO THE

Rev. Thomas Starr King,

THE COMPANION OF MY EARLY STUDIES;

THE FRIEND OF MY SOCIAL LIFE;

THE BROTHER OF MY NOBLER LIFE IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST;

THESE PAGES ARE

Inscribed.

PREFACE.

Now that I am about to inform the readers of my book what place I would have it occupy in their esteem, I confess to an embarrassment I have not felt during its preparation. I know well enough what these words are to me; what they can become to others, I know not. Yet of this I am certain, they must not be read as a treatise upon theology, or even a book of sermons. To inflict upon a community worried by its legion of theological systems a new one, at the end of a six years' parish ministry, or to offer discourses which, at best, are but a series of experiments in the art of pulpit expression, as models for anybody's imitation, is not my present ambition.

Of course, as a minister of Christianity, I shrink not from the consequences of what I do; and he who will show me any dangerous heresy, or defect in taste, in these pages, shall be reckoned so far my friend. But I confess I would rather hear that one man or woman had been awakened to newness of life by these my words, than that I had appeased the theologians and charmed the critics. My book, if anything, is an attempt to reflect a few of the "Graces and Powers of the Christian Life," as they have come to me, and I have been able to render them before the people to whom I minister. In selecting the discourses, I have chosen such as are valuable to myself, because they were written out of a genuine feeling, — often out of a vital experience. I certainly may speak of what I know;

and I do know the truth of what is here so imperfectly translated. I would have these pages read, then, as sincere words written out of varied moods of doubt and faith; and a culture gained more from life than books; and toils not so great in themselves as formidable to a weariness which has often found in them its best solace; and the love of a few who have now become a part of all I do and am; and the efforts of whose faithfulness God must judge, to speak well of the grand, beautiful and solemn facts of the soul. I would have my book read as a whole, from beginning to end, that the reader may gather from an entire impression that unity of rhythm and spirit which underlies unity of form and opinion, and is the vital power in every living book or living man. That, now and then, some fact of the Christian life may appear more real and imperative from the point of view at which I have seen it, and that the spirit in which I believe myself to have written may be communicated to the reader, is all I dare hope will come of my work.

I am willing to trust this volume to those who can accept it as I give it; to them only does it belong. They will discover that the best thing in it is my desire to become a better preacher and a better man than he who wrote it. I have never so truly felt as now how poorly our best words represent our deepest life, how far is that life itself below the Christian's ideal. These pages are now a part of my past. May such a blessing as they deserve go out with them into the world, while I press onward in the high service of my Lord and Master!

GLoucester, May 1, 1852.

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I.

SPIRITUAL THINGS SPIRITUALLY DISCERNED.

“ But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” — 1 Cor. 2 : 14.

IN this passage Paul teaches that the sensual, worldly man, who is interested only in outward things, is incapable of accepting the truths of religion, or knowing the superior excellence of a religious life. Most of the people in the world are in this condition, and, therefore, do not appreciate or obey Christianity ; neither can they do so until they comply with the conditions of spiritual growth ; for Christianity, like everything great and good, demands a long and hard discipline from its disciples, before it reveals itself. To this truth I wish, now, to call your attention. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned ; the religious life can be understood only by religious men ; and a bad man, though obliged to walk by the light of his own conscience, is incompetent to decide upon moral distinctions. I will endeavor to illustrate this fact by familiar examples ; show the conditions of knowledge in

spiritual things, and apply the general principles of my discourse to a few states of the public mind.

The principle here affirmed of Christianity extends over the entire ground of human life. A man can understand only that of which he has accurate knowledge, gained by obedience to certain conditions. Especially is this true in actual life. The great facts in a profession can only be known by him who has lived in it; and a man's employment also modifies his general ideas of life, and creates the atmosphere through which he looks upon the world.

The statesman learns statesmanship by study and public service. From his youth, he has been acquainted with politics, and a careful observer of the operation of laws. He has read history, that he might compare ancient and modern states; informed himself of the condition of the people under various kinds of government,—their industrial resources and habits, their intellectual and moral elevation. Furnished with the necessary information, he enters political life, and begins to test his knowledge and theories. He brings a philosophical mind to the interpretation of public events, while he permits those events to modify his erroneous opinions. Thus, by years of service, he gains, at last, political sagacity. He knows the great interests of his country, and its relations to foreign nations, and can almost predict with certainty the effect of any course of legislation. And he will naturally look at human life through the windows of the state, and think chiefly of

the duties of man as a citizen. He has acquired this ability and intellectual habit by the discipline to which he has subjected himself. He discerns political things through political sagacity.

Now, it is evident that his opinion is valuable upon statesmanship, but of less value upon subjects with which he is unacquainted. He might indeed be an indifferent judge of poetry. The poet certainly is the man whose word must be accepted here ; for he has devoted his life to the practice of this art. He is acquainted with the greatest productions of poetical literature, and decides upon their value, not by arbitrary or casual impressions, but a knowledge of the nature of poetry, its relation to the outward and inward world, and its laws of development. Thus he has acquired a poetic sense, and, when he reads a page of rhyme, knows whether it is a poem. And his view of life is poetic. He regards men in their relations to what is beautiful. His point of view is different from that of the statesman ; and the whole universe presents a different appearance.

In like manner, the merchant, the scholar, the farmer, the mechanic, if a diligent student and laborer in his profession, must know best its excellencies and defects ; while, at the same time, his view of life is somewhat determined by the point he occupies. This truth is so well understood, that we are accustomed to treat the opinions of men upon subjects disconnected from their habits of thought with neglect, and resent the interference of one profession with another, as the attempt of folly to instruct wisdom.

The principle which is true in this respect of worldly affairs is emphatically true of religion. Religion is the most important of human affairs. The professions are modes of activity adapted to this state of existence, and many of them will probably never be resumed after death. But religion embraces the whole duty and education of man, and his relations to God and eternity. Therefore, it is the employment of all employments, and includes within itself everything else; holding this world and its affairs in secondary relations as means of accomplishing its work. And if no ordinary profession can be understood except by long study and practice, what shall we say of this, which is the highest knowledge, the most difficult art, the most arduous labor? And if the statesman and the merchant cannot understand the peculiar worth of poetry, so well as the poet, and are unable to appreciate his views of life, how can the irreligious man know the divine mysteries of the spiritual world, and have that realizing sense of the grandeur and excellence of the life in Christ possessed by him who has consecrated his best powers and all his days to the service of God? Religion is not to be immediately comprehended by a sensual, careless mind, or by him who has sought everything except "the kingdom of God and his righteousness." The Gospel of Christ contains things which even the wicked and the ignorant may understand. It stoops to the lowest deep of human abasement, but only to raise the fallen soul up to itself. It is greater and better than any of us know ;

only Jesus Christ knew all its treasures of wisdom and power. And according to our likeness to Jesus shall we discover its surpassing value. Only by compliance with conditions can we know anything of religion, or enjoy the peculiar happiness and purity of discernment belonging to a genuine follower of the Master.

These conditions of spiritual discernment will appear when we consider what religion is. Love to God and love to man, with everything which naturally depends upon and is related to it, is Christianity. But how can a worldly, selfish man obtain this spirit of love? Now his affections are placed upon other objects, the great desires of his heart run counter to this. Before he can change the current of his nature he must be brought into a condition where he will be shown the insufficiency of his present mode of life, and directed to the only true source of satisfaction. How this happens is one of the mysteries of our human nature; but, by various outward agencies, which doubtless obey a higher than mortal command, he is reminded of his sin, and impressed with a longing for something better. It may appear when some affliction has taught him his own weakness; or in the form of remorse for an act of wickedness; or as an aspiration, born from the contemplation of a spectacle of goodness;—but, however it may come, it gives a desire to know more of holiness, and be more conformed to the spirit of God.

But, as yet, there is little of the appreciation or enjoy-

ment of a true life. The spiritual eye is dim; and the confused soul, just awaking from its long sleep, knows not what to believe or do. But amid its confusion a point of life appears; one course of action takes the form of *duty*; and the man feels that, come what will, he must do this. And this obedience to *duty* is the path out of the darkness. He must follow his best convictions of rectitude, asking help of God, and not being too vain of his own strength, follow them honestly, simply, perseveringly. For Jesus has said; "He who doeth the will of my Father, shall know of the doctrine." And, painful as it may be to begin the work of a good life in the midst of such uncertainty, there is yet no other way to the knowledge of good. Everything depends now upon fidelity to the best convictions. If there is only one duty clear to the conscience, and that apparently unimportant, it must nevertheless be performed; for the whole hope of repentance hinges upon this. In saying this, it is not maintained that a wicked soul can work its way up to holiness by merit of a few good acts. But the performance of these acts is the condition upon which strength is given, as an indication of the quality of the spirit. Therefore, let him who is just awakened to a desire for holiness, accept his sorrow, contrition and confusion for a time. These he must endure because he has sinned. And let him fix his eye upon whatever small, clear light of duty shines through the darkness, and march straight to that, trusting in God.

Then, as he goes on, new light and power will be given him. The performance of one obligation will clear the way towards the next. Gradually it will become easier to resist temptation, and virtue will appear more desirable. Moral distinctions will become more definite, and the conscience will become more sensitive to the presence of wrong. The longing for reconciliation to God will grow into a controlling passion, and the desire to love and do good to man, will increase with it. And thus, by a process not to be described, but partially comprehensible to him who has actually been through it,—though even not wholly clear to him,—does the soul pass out of its old state of rebellion and unrest into a condition of love, faith and obedience.

No wonder that, when speaking of this great change, the writers of the New Testament call it “a new birth,” a “putting on of the new man.” So it is; for now the man who was selfish and worldly has become disinterested and spiritually-minded. Once his great object was to secure the possession of goods, or honors, or means of happiness; now he cares only to live a good life; and if this be done will consent to suffer any deprivation. Once the praise of man was the rule of his conduct; now he seeks only the favor of God. Once he was troubled by the fluctuations of society, and reverses in his own fortune; now he views earthly changes in their relation to the culture of his soul for eternity. Once he lived in the world with chance; now he lives in the world with Providence.

In truth, his whole tone of thought and conduct is changed. He lives for other objects, in a different moral atmosphere, and estimates character and events upon different principles from his former habit. He *has* been "born again,"—born into the kingdom of heaven, through the help of God, and his own faithful striving towards the light.

And this is the only man who knows divine things. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." He has complied with the conditions of obtaining spiritual discernment,—has fought his way up to his present vantage-ground of hope and peace. To him, love, truth and beauty, are the only realities. He alone can estimate the value of life; for he stands above its narrow hopes and fears, his faith surely fixed upon God. Yes, he is the man to tell you what religion is,—how it leads the soul out of slavery into glorious liberty, changes the whole purpose of existence, and gives a knowledge of man to which no wit can ever attain; how, when once enjoyed, it throws such an air of littleness over the objects of popular ambition, that one can only look with compassion from its calm height upon the confused struggle below. This he knows, and he alone, because he has done God's will. His idea of religion is not a guess, a picture of the heated fancy, or a parson's catch-word; but is composed of the facts of his own experience. And in proportion to his advancement in the religious life his information becomes more accurate, his discernment more acute, his conscience more active, till his mind, in relation to others, is a test of

spiritual things, and his words and example a guide to many,—as one tall beacon will fling its rays along a coast, and light a thousand ships upon their journey home.

The apostle therefore, in my text, only applies a familiar principle to the most important subject of thought. He says that the opinion of a man is good for nothing upon a matter of which he knows nothing; and that, just as we would rely upon the words of an experienced statesman for information upon statesmanship, or value the ideas of a great poet upon his own art, so should we accept the testimony of a tried Christian to the worth of that religion with which he alone is acquainted. And that knowledge can be acquired only as he has gained it, by actually living the Christian life, and thereby entering into new and higher relations to man and God.

But, strange to say, this most obvious principle is forgotten when men of the world deal with religion. They are true to it while in contact with ordinary affairs, upon which their temporal interest depends; but when they hear a good man talk of the value of the spiritual life, although they know he speaks from actual experience, they give but half a mind to his testimony. They have never seen evidence of what he affirms. It must be that those things which they see, and touch, and live with every day, are the only realities. It cannot be that unseen things ever assume that importance, to a man of common sense, which this person pretends. He must be fanatical, visionary, or at least unpractical. It may be well enough

for him to speak eloquently of religion, and live in his dreams and ecstasies; but for plain, direct, "matter-of-fact" men, this fare is not substantial. This is the ordinary feeling about Christianity among men whose employments are principally with material things. They admire a person who acts from principle and lives like Jesus Christ; but are not quite sure whether, after all, he is not a splendid enthusiast, and will not, by and by, awake from his vision to what they call "the realities of life." There is a deep-seated scepticism of this kind through society, which is the most formidable obstacle to the success of Christianity.

But, surely, these persons do not consider how illogical and inconsistent is their conduct. They assume to pronounce judgment upon the highest subject of human contemplation while in utter ignorance of it. Pray, my friend, who should know best what Christianity is? There is a man whose life, for many years, has been blameless. He has not been swept away by his passions, or appetites, or ambition, or covetousness. All these enemies he has kept at arm's length. He has known trial, and not fallen into despair; has known men, and preserved his love for humanity; has kept himself consistent, strong and pure, amid a thousand earthly changes. And now, at the end of a life of heroic struggles for the true and good, he tells you that religion is a reality, and the only reality. What argument against him can you offer? Why, you suspect he may be deceived. Things look differently to you.

And why should they not? You have spent your life in a lower region, in the headlong pursuit of riches, power, or some form of worldly pleasure. How can you know anything of religion? Its invitations you have slighted, its duties you have repudiated; you have sneered at its laws, despised its joys, and mocked at its threatenings. How can you hope to appreciate the truth of this man's words, or lift yourself to the comprehension of a character shaped amid sorrows, and labors, and delights, of which you know nothing? Your argument is a baseless assertion, flung against his holy life. You would be despised, in a commercial enterprise, if you treated the opinions of an old merchant, who has carried London and Paris and India in his head for half a century, with contempt. The great statesman of the nation tells you his opinion upon the state of the country, and you believe him, and cannot sufficiently extol his sagacity. But here is a man who, for fifty years, has lived a devout and useful life; has known what it is to love man and God; and when he tells you that your only real joy, and peace, and strength, must come from spiritual things, you say he is an enthusiast, or, at least, lives as if he were talking of dreams. But he is right, and you, my friend, are wrong. And it is a dreadful delusion in which you live, out of which it becomes you to make a speedy retreat. You are down in a rocky valley, walled in by hills and cliffs, and can only look a little way around, and see a bare strip of sky overhead. He stands upon yonder peak, radiant with the

setting sun, and looks abroad over fields, and rivers, and cities, out to the horizon's verge. You may stay where you are, and tell him this grand sight is all a figment of his own brain ; but it were wiser, methinks, to climb up where he is, and open your soul to the glories which fill his own, and bend your knees with him beneath the awful heavens.

This is folly, indeed ; but we are sometimes compelled to endure more than this ; to see those who know nothing of religion, and whose lives have been anything but religious, assume to teach others concerning moral distinctions. Some father, whose years have been sold to Mammon, instructing his son to make self-interest the rule of life ; some mother, whose soul never opened wide enough to let in a generous affection, teaching her daughter that there is no true love ; some partisan soldier of a Christian sect, reading saints out of the church ; some politician, scarred by a hundred elections, in which the contest was not for justice, but power, in a great moral crisis of a nation's life, gravely taking the chair of divinity ; explaining the Bible and the " whole duty of man ;" talking down conscience, and discharging his indignation against men who have lived near God long enough to know that He is the ruler of the universe. In a moral crisis, only a good man's opinion is valuable. The words of men who have thought of little but their trade, their politics, or their pleasures, however important on minor points, are of small worth now. They will apply to great

questions of duty the logic of the counter or the caucus, or permit their love of ease to drive out their love of truth. The desirable man, now, is he who has lived a spiritual life in the world, and by long efforts in the service of his Master, and profound knowledge of men and events, has gained a clearness of discernment almost prophetic. He will do justice to human interests, because he stands above them, and cause God's will to be done; for, in the words of Paul,—“He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.”

It is a solemn period in a man's life, when he awakes to the fact that religion is the only reality. Have not you, my friends, at times, more than suspected this to be true? I doubt it not. Then accept that moment's belief as the highest in your life, and strive upward toward it. Obey the first duty; follow your best light. Then you will become possessors of that spiritual sense to which this world and the future appear in their true relations. This may be hard to believe, and harder to do. But you have the assurance of every noble soul that this is the way to manhood. Be thankful to God, that he has given this long array of spirits, ascending in saintly rank up to Jesus Christ, that you might find a companion at every step of your journey to heaven. These are your instructors, these your friends. Look upon their faces and grasp their hands, for their strength is from above, and the light upon their brows falls from the splendor around the throne. Distrust the pleading of your passions and

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your selfishness. Listen to the voice, however low, that calleth to better things. So shall you be released from the bondage of self and the senses, and look through clear, piercing eyes, which everywhere in earth and heaven behold the glory of God.

II.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE WORLD.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.” — MATT. 6 : 33.

IN the preceding verses of this chapter, the Saviour warns his disciples against an undue interest in the things of this world. By illustrations drawn from the “lilies of the field,” and the “fowls of the air,” he represents to them the providence of God ; and infers thence that too much anxiety about food and raiment is an implication of the Divine benevolence. This he says, not to encourage an indolent reliance upon Providence, but to discourage an absorbing pursuit of earthly goods. And this naturally brings him to the truth of our text. Having shown what the purpose of life is not, he now states what it is. “*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.*”

I will now attempt to explain and illustrate the meaning of this passage. What did Jesus Christ mean, when he said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ; *and all these things shall be added unto you*”?

And, first, he did not mean that if a man obeys God he shall be rewarded by earthly prosperity ; or if a sinner,

shall be punished by earthly misfortune. He did not mean this, and I am particularly desirous to put this notion out of the way before I proceed in my discourse; for the mischief it does in preventing a correct view of the Christian life is incalculable. It degrades religion to a trade between the Creator and his creatures. Upon their part, obedience is promised; upon his, the good things of the world. So the righteous man works for wages, and even murmurs against God if he is not satisfied according to his own estimate of what is due.

The doctrine is not supported by facts. Good men are not always, or often, the most fortunate. Look into any community, and you will be satisfied that, as far as houses and lands and such things go, the best men are often the worst off. The man who has cheated all his life, may have money, and the honest merchant become a bankrupt. The ignorant and godless creature of fashion lives in the midst of luxuries that only oppress him, while under his windows a young man of genius and piety enough to regenerate a city is wearing out his life in labors which a hundredth part of the yearly income of his neighbor would relieve. The great and good men only get into the minor offices of state, — fortunate if they get there; the little, bad politicians are placed in the highest situations, — so it is, at least, as often as otherwise. Goodness is as often in straits as sin, and in spite of all our predictions it continues so to be.

And a Christian is willing enough it should be so;

since goodness cannot be paid for, nor is the "Kingdom of God meat and drink." When a man loves the truth, and obeys it, he forgets this mercantile idea of religion. His obedience elevates him into the presence of God. Truth becomes so sacred that he would follow it to death itself. All the virtues come and live in his soul, and give him sometimes peace, or if not that, a longing for holiness which is better than peace. Such a man dwells in a new world; a world in which God, Duty, and Immortality, not money, reputation, and pleasure, are the realities. And think you he cares to be paid for his obedience? Must God give him, in recompense for his virtue, meat and drink, and lands and merchandise? Why, such a man, with only one garment and a crust of bread, and no place to lay down at night, is more blessed than a king that tosses from midnight till morning upon his couch of gold and down, his soul full of remorse for crime and tyranny! Virtue is its own reward. He who has it, has more than the world can give, — has God, and good spirits, and high thoughts, and gentle emotions for his companions. And would you punish a sinner by taking away his earthly goods? Poor man, let him keep them! His dead soul must have something to amuse itself with. No; virtue is not to be revered for what she brings, in this world or the next, but for what she *is*; being, herself, the impersonation of the great, good and beautiful. Sin is not to be hated for its consequences, but because it is sin; the only essentially vile, weak, and loathsome thing in

the universe. Jesus, then, did not mean, when he spoke the words of our text, that God would pay his creatures for being like him, by giving them plenty to eat and drink, fine clothes, and houses, and people to repeat their praises; or that he would take away from a man, who had killed his own soul, the few comforts which the perishing things of sense can afford him. Far different is the economy of the "Kingdom of Heaven."

The leading thought in this passage cannot easily be mistaken. "*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.*" The development of the spiritual faculties is the chief purpose of existence. No other employment can be compared in importance with it; and every occupation is valuable in proportion as it offers facilities for prosecuting this great work. The education of the soul is the central fact in life, round which all others must be arranged; and until we accept and live in this truth, we cannot estimate properly the importance of anything. If we give all our energies to the attainment of an inferior object, we shall certainly exaggerate its importance, and underrate the value of other pursuits. If we "seek first the kingdom of God," all things will be seen in their true relations; we shall be in a position from which we can estimate their comparative value to us as means of religious culture. "All things shall be added unto you": that is, you shall know the worth of all things. Standing at the central point of life, you shall

see how much of actual good dwells in every object of human pursuit.

This I conceive to be the meaning of the Saviour. Spiritual culture is the central point in existence, the chief object of pursuit; and only when we are heartily engaged in it can we understand, and truly be said to possess, the things of this life. Let me illustrate this truth by facts in the material and spiritual world. There is always one central point of observation in a landscape, from which its parts instinctively array themselves into a beautiful picture. Standing there, the hills, woods, water, rocks and plains, lie around in perfect proportions. There is a hill in my own town, which is such a point for a landscape of many miles. From its top I can see the hills beyond, rising, dipping into the valleys, or declining into cultivated ground. There are woods enough to relieve the eye, and in the distance rise the church spires of the several villages, and beyond glitters the blue sea line, fading off into the sky. The effect is so complete, and the lights and shadows are so disposed that you cannot keep the eye long fixed upon a single point. Each thing is so beautifully blended with everything else that you are forced to look at the whole. And it appears, as it lies outstretched there in a silence broken only by the faint sound of wind in the tree-tops and the dashing of waves heard at intervals upon the distant beach, to be a creation of itself, a little world surrounded by infinity. A walk of a few minutes brings me to a place where nothing

looks right. I see only the bare, rocky outlines of the hills, as uninteresting as if they had been torn out of that beautiful world and thrown away by themselves. All depends upon the true point of observation.

And so in reading a book, written by a great man. We cannot understand it till we have grasped the central thought. We must rise to his point of view, before we can see the reasonableness or unreasonableness of his system. People read the best books, and do not get the meaning of the writer. They remember a few detached observations and brilliant sentences; but of the idea or ideas the work was planned to enforce they know nothing. The whole mass lies confused before them. The arguments appear insufficient, the illustrations faulty, the opinions contradictory to each other and to common sense. The usual mode of overcoming this difficulty is to say that the author did not know what he meant when he wrote it; or to blame him for writing things incomprehensible to the common mind. A wise man, however, is satisfied that the book has a plan, and is willing to labor to reach the central thought. He may for a while grope in darkness; but at last he gains the point whence a light streams forth clearing up all obscurities. Then the arguments and the illustrations fall into their proper relations, the contradictory opinions reconcile themselves by appearing to be only different statements of the same truth, and the whole work lies outspread before his mind so distinctly that he will never forget it.

He has only to recall the central thought, and immediately everything flashes again upon his memory. Thus, in literature, as in nature, there is always one point of observation from which other things can be rightly viewed.

Now, it is precisely thus in life; and by life I mean the union of everything with which we are concerned; nature, literature, art, business, pleasure, physical, mental, æsthetic and religious culture. And, I repeat, there is one central point, and only one, from which we can look out upon these, and see them in their proper relations. That point of observation is *spiritual culture*. "*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.*" As soon as we devote our best energies to this work, other things fall into their proper places. We know what each is worth to us, and how far it is to be pursued. We understand the relative importance that business, pleasure and study should assume in our plan of living. We can then estimate character justly. We are not confused or overcome by reverses in fortune. All things are in their places, and from our mount of spiritual vision we see the vast and beautiful domain of life beneath us, the blue sky overarching, and the ocean of eternity flowing around it, and all encompassed, and filled, and sanctified by the infinite providence of God!

But away from this central position every portion of life is seen in false relations. An inferior object of pursuit is exalted at the expense of every other. It matters little what is assumed as the end of existence if its true

purpose be forgotten. Some occupations are doubtless more elevated than others ; but if they are placed at the summit, the disarrangement is almost as complete as if one of less importance was there. We cannot depart one step from this central point of spiritual culture without confusing the whole prospect of existence. I will briefly show the results of such a departure by one familiar example.

Take the man who lives principally to gratify the senses, the man of pleasure, — there are too many such men ; — and although his point of observation is almost as distant as can be conceived from that of the Christian, it is yet one of the most ordinary that comes to our notice. He thinks that pleasure is the “chief end of man.” His gospel practically reads ; — “Seek first the gratification of the senses.” Of course, other things arrange themselves around him in a certain way, for he cannot avoid giving some attention to affairs so common as business, study and religion. But see how his touch degrades every noble and beautiful thing. He sees in the objects and occupations around him only that portion which will serve the great purpose of his life. If he is employed in business, you cannot think he will be very desirous to sustain the honor of his profession. He only is concerned to get out of it the money that will furnish his house, and cover his table, and fill his cellars, and pay the expenses of his pleasures. Thus any degree of meanness can be practised at the trade, if it promotes this object. He will “stick” at a bargain for a few cents with the poor woman

that sells him berries, or washes his clothes, while hundreds of dollars will be lavished in one night of feasting and drunkenness with his friends. He must pinch at one end that he may squander at the other; thus doing all he can to degrade the reputation of a respectable calling, and driving honest men away from it. If he studies, it is not so much for love of the truth, as to pass away an hour that might lie heavily upon his hands, or to acquire knowledge enough to avoid ridiculous mistakes in good society; and the manner in which he talks about literature makes educated men almost ashamed of their learning. If he goes to see a work of art, it is not to be elevated by the expression beaming from the face and form of a Greek Slave or a Virgin Mary, but to talk of it with his friends, or, perhaps, to burn with lustful passions before that which kindles flames of celestial love in the soul of him who is pure. Woe to the state, if such a man gets into office. Justice and Mercy are degraded to the rank of waiters upon his table; and to cram his own life with good things, he will see corruption, and disorder, and dishonesty, and want, scourging a whole nation. Woe to the church, if he stands in the sacred desk, and woe to religion, if its honors and preferments are laid upon his shoulders. Thereupon arises a scandal against good morals that sets all the infidel tongues a-wagging; for love, and humility, and disinterestedness are crowded away, and the kingdom of God becomes the paradise of Mahomet, and amid the flashing of cups, and the steam of feasts,

and the glitter of equipage, and the blaze of purple and fine linen, religion mournfully goes out of the church, and Satan briskly comes in! Pleasure is the central object in his plan of existence, and beauty and sanctity and love disappear, and he lives in a faded universe; nature only created to give him corn, and wool, and wine — spirit only existing to impart the sense of enjoyment to his pampered body.

Is it possible that such a man can see the world as it really is? Of course, it is not. He sees there only what he wants, and he wants only enough to be comfortable. His estimate of everything is false. His sensualism poisons every judgment he pronounces upon character, and every opinion he forms of any subject of human speculation. This wonderful earthly existence, filled with God, is to him only a transient house of entertainment, — a hotel, where he can stop and spend a few foolish years between the eternity that is past and the eternity that is to come.

The sensualist finds in all things only what will minister to his appetites and pleasures. The Christian, out of the same things, obtains the materials and occasions for spiritual discipline. Where the one sees only meat, and drink, and raiment, and the outward embellishments of life, the other sees beauty, truth and love. The sensualist instinctively appropriates the meanest portion of what he touches, and gives to every subject its most insignificant interpretation; the Christian, as unconsciously, receives only good influences, and explains every appearance by

the light of a spiritual philosophy. The latter alone comprehends the true value of life in its manifold relations; for he takes from each part that which will aid him in the development of his nature. And this is the chief worth of things to us; for, whatever may be the absolute value of any creature or opinion, to us it can only be estimable according to the instruction and discipline we derive from it. Nothing in life is destitute of value, nothing so mean or common that a great soul cannot be quickened by contact with it. The Christian, standing at the centre, discerns this fact, tests the worth of all things, and out of them gathers new power. The vulgar distinction of sacred and profane no longer holds; for God is everywhere present in his creation, and the hidden sources of beauty and joy lie scattered all around the believing soul.

Therefore, when the instructed Christian comes in contact with life, in any of its forms, it is only to receive strength, and reveal the innate worth of that with which he deals. If he only makes pins, or plants corn, his business becomes a spiritual discipline. The trials of patience and temper, with which it abounds, are gladly accepted as occasions to prove and invigorate his power of resistance to little temptations. Every day, in the ordinary course of his work, he may practise all the Christian virtues. By faithfulness in his labor, by strict honesty in his dealings, by courtesy and benevolence to those about him, by submission to those providential events which we call mis-

fortunes, and by humility in prosperity, does he prove his discipleship, and confer a dignity upon his trade. Any occupation becomes noble after a great and good man has shown what can be made of it. A weak and wicked man will make even theology disreputable ; a strong and saintly nature will make the serving of others honorable. This meaning the Christian draws out of business, because he sees it in its true relation, as a means of spiritual culture. And when he reads, he only obtains good. The filth and foolishness through which every cultivated man is obliged to wade in the search for truth do not remain upon his garments. His pure soul has a repelling power which keeps away harm. That which would set a lower nature on fire, only appears loathsome to him. Thus he moves through the domain of literature, attracting to himself every good thing ; becoming wiser, and better, and more refined from every book he reads. And art has none but the holiest revelations for him. In the faces of saints and the forms of goddesses he sees glimpses of the infinite beauty struggling to express itself through the inspiration of genius. And even his amusement becomes sanctified ; for in the joyous unbending of his faculties, and the outpouring of innocent mirth, he often feels himself drawing nearer to purity than in hours of grave pursuits. And his is the prepared soul to which nature sings her everlasting anthem, ranging through all tones, from the low stir of grass-blades shaken by the wind, to the loud breaking of ocean waves against rocks in a tem-

pest. Time and place and circumstance do not enslave him; for if he can see the heavens above, and feel the earth beneath, he knows a joy that cannot be told. For when the morning sunshine comes into his chamber and invites him forth, he goes out into the open air to talk with God; and when high noon has driven every bird into the foliage, he sits at his window, and from the gleaming landscape come pictures that store his mind for sadder and cloudier days; and when the sun of evening is slowly withdrawing, and the blazing clouds, one by one, lose their radiant colors amid the gathering shadows, he thinks of that good Providence which removes the soul of man from its earthly darkness to shine in distant lands. So, all his life long, "day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." And if the world is so fortunate as to be served by him in any elevated position, it is seen how great are justice and religion when dispensed by pure hands; for when he governs, obedience becomes the willing tribute of love, and when he speaks from the pulpit, the church walls are dedicated anew by every word that comes out of his mouth, and men who, all the week, have lived away from God, now find themselves standing in the presence of virtue, trembling before her awful rebukings, or melting at her resistless appeals. And though sin cannot be overcome in a day, and the world fights hard to hold its slaves in subjection, yet the power of the Most High is in the word he speaks, and it cannot stop till it has gone the circuit of

the whole earth, and awakened a response in every slumbering soul.

Thus stands the Christian at the centre of life, and around him extend great occasions and pliant materials. He has "sought *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and 'all things have been added unto' him." Does he not, in truth, possess all things; he, for whom the present has nothing but joy and truth, and the past is offering its fruitful experiences; for whom the mysterious future is waiting, full of new revelations? He has overcome fear, even the great fear of death; for, when he turns his eyes that way, the clouds that veil the spirit-land are sometimes rent, and the sweet faces of those who are there, look out for a moment tenderly upon him. He is above discontent; for why should there be complaint in a life regulated by a Father's love? He lives in a consecrated world; a world from which already the forms of sin, and sorrow, and all things unlovely are retiring. He doubts not the final harmony of creation with its Creator; and while men of weak faith and cold hearts are crazed by the noise and confusion of the earthly strife between good and evil, his ear, divinely tuned, already catches the distant tones of the song of triumph, that increasing, and swelling louder and louder, shall at last burst upon the astonished world; the prelude of the great day of love, when a reconciled universe shall rejoice with its Creator.

III.

HUMAN DEPENDENCE.

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” — Ps. 91 : 1.

PERHAPS there never has been a time in the history of the human race when it was more necessary to define the sources of power in the human soul than now. In what does strength of mind consist? Is it found in what is called self-reliance, in confidence in our own power to overcome obstacles by sheer force of will, unaided by others, and unconscious of superhuman assistance; or does it come, as others maintain, from sympathy with our fellow-men, and a participation in the life of humanity? Both these opinions are stoutly maintained by persons who do not see that each represents a portion of that final truth which neither fully comprehends. Independence of unnatural restraint, imposed by other minds, is doubtless an important condition of power; since we are weak, and only weak, while compelled to imitate. Yet it does not follow that independence from restraint is power. It only puts us in a state where we may avail ourselves of the strength that comes to us. That strength is not

self-evolved; and the idea that we can, by simple energy of will, hold our spirits up to any elevated point, is one of those delusions in which the philosophers and the populace meet upon common ground. And equally incorrect is the assertion that our strength comes from human sympathy. This is also an indispensable condition of power. We must feel ourselves a part of some other life than our own before we can have any confidence in ourselves. But individual sympathy or public benevolence only end in weakness and weariness, unsustained by something entirely above and superior to themselves. The true statement is, that differently constituted minds, or the same mind in different states, depend upon these conditions of self-reliance and sympathy for the opportunity of successful action. One man is strongest alone, and feels his power most looking off from his solitary pinnacle of greatness, with no disturbing soul along his horizon. Another needs human surroundings, the warm clasp of friendly hands, the familiar tones of loving voices, to assure his heart and nerve his arm. But both these classes of minds, or any others that may appear, are finally dependent upon the same source of life; and all the varied forms of human constitution and action meet and are reconciled in one central fact.

This fact is grandly announced by the psalmist, in my text. "*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*" The only source of human power is faith in

God. All self-reliance, all leaning upon human sympathy are worthless separated from this. Through whatever avenue we would seek energy and life, we are led at last to the Omnipotent Creator; the infinite love, out of which we were born, and by which alone we exist.

In saying that faith in God is the only source of human power, I do not mean faith in any theological idea of God, in any trinity, or any definite humanized personality. God cannot be held in this way in the mind. He is infinite love, and can be known only as he manifests himself in various ways. We do not find God at the end of any chain of logic, in any formula of the schools, or in any conceivable place; but we find him everywhere. When we repose upon the truth, we have found God. When we think ourselves resting upon human love, we are only resting upon God, felt through his creatures' affection. When we are lifted into a harmonious life by the sight of beauty, we are only unconsciously worshipping him who is Beauty itself. We cannot labor, or live sincerely anywhere, without finding God. He "besets us behind and before;" meets us at every turn of thought, in every experience of affection, in every intuition of the imagination. To have entire faith in God, is to believe in him as the source of all that is great, good, and beautiful; and whenever or wherever we find reality, to cover our faces in reverence, as in his presence; to feel that, however other things may conduct us to him, and however suf-

ficing they may appear in themselves, they are but the modes of communication between the soul and its Creator.

This form of faith is rare, is possible only to an instructed and obedient spirit. It is the object and reward of life to gain it, and the satisfaction of the soul through eternity is only this. The faith of most men does not reach as far as this central and reconciling fact. They believe, not in God, but in some partial appearance of God; in the power of truth, the worth of human love, the sufficiency of beauty, or perhaps they are even below this, and may pin their faith upon some person or scheme of benevolence, or tendency of their own mind. Or there may be those so unfortunate as not to be able to point to anything upon which they really repose. Yet they have a secret faith in something, which, unknown to themselves, sustains them. If they had not, life in this world would become impossible, and insanity or spiritual annihilation would follow the departure of the last hope from the soul.

God thus appears through a thousand partial manifestations, as if in mercy to our weakness, and those who cannot at once feel his all-sufficing presence, may climb up to him by these ladders he has let down into our mortal life. It is true that independence of the interference of others is a great step towards entire faith in Him; and so is sympathy with others; and so are many of those states of mind which we call religious. Truth, purity, disinterestedness, all the virtues, are the ways of access

to this condition, where power and dependence mean the same ; where utter reliance upon the Divine love furnishes us for the duties, trials, and conflicts of life below, and is the prophecy of life increasing forever in power and love.

This fact, that power comes from God, reconciles and explains the problem of human action. It makes the strength of the Christian comprehensible, and defines the energy of the worldly, while it exposes the delusion in which they live. The proof of its truth is thus found in its ability to account for all the phenomena of power appearing among men.

It explains the strength of the Christian. There is no point in his journey towards a good life, where he can rest in his own individuality, or upon his companions. At every moment of his progress he is sustained by God. Wonderfully does this appear in the great crises of his existence, when he is called to make that sacrifice for the truth, which, at once, strikes down his pride, and separates him from his friends. The martyr, who goes to death for the fact which is only a crazy ideal to those who lead him there, knows that nothing but Omnipotent energy will avail him. Neither the elevation of conscious superiority, nor the prophetic assurance of the future triumph of his truth, nor the love of dear human souls, can give that power by which his spirit looks down those writhing surges of fire, and feels, unmoved, the mortal shrivel away from the immortal. In vain would pride

encourage, or the future promise, or disciples revere, were he not able then to go out of himself to Him in the depths of whose wisdom repose both past and future, and who lets no martyr die unattested; were he not able to lift himself from the trembling arms of flesh that would fain hold him back, and go near that Almighty One who giveth strength without shadow of weakness or fear. Once away from himself and his friends, he can behold unmoved his own departure, and the fate of the truth for which he dies; for he looks towards God out of this scene of horror, and is more the spectator of his own dissolution than any whom curiosity, or hatred, or affection have gathered around his burning pile.

And in the same manner is the Christian sustained through his every-day life. Think of the battles he fights daily, ever renewed; one set of combatants only giving away for another; conflicts with his own wicked propensities, which, routed in one trial, appear in a shape more subtle and dangerous, and assail another side of his nature; conflicts with his aspirations, which, if permitted to become diseased, are equally dangerous foes to his peace with his sins, since they leave him prostrate in the shadow of self-accusation; conflicts with his human affections, which coax him away from duty, tease him to unmanly compliance with custom, for the sake of peace, or through his selfishness and love of ease undermine his executive energies; conflicts with the great wicked world outside, which roars and beats, like an angry sea, about the little boat in

which he has perilled all his hope. Indeed, when life is really seen in its height, and breadth, and depth, the thought to do worthily in it, without complete reliance upon God, is too foolish for a moment's acceptance. One definite purpose may be pursued for a time with a kind of self-reliance which appears very like independence of man or Deity ; but life was not given that we might do one great thing, but might be men ; and when the desire to do is merged in the higher effort to be, this self-reliance dwindles abashed before the mighty destiny of the soul ; and it seems as absurd to believe man can alone achieve it, as that, by mere force of muscular energy, he can lift himself from the ground into the clouds. And we may go away from the noise and toil of existence into a quiet corner, and gather about us a few kindred souls, and try to live alone upon their affection ; but we become weaker from their caresses, and more inefficient from our intense doubting and questioning ; and, at last, tired of such ebb and flow, ever returning upon itself, like waves rushing into each other with no result but froth and spray, we resolve to give all we are to God and his service, and flow out from our pent-up selves, like noble rivers from small brooks swelling to mighty currents that sweep across continents, bordered by fruitful fields, sailed over by crowded ships, while sun, moon, and stars, flying clouds and spaces of heavenly blue look down upon themselves reflected in the tide below. God alone is the Christian's source of power ; for the Christian " dwelleth in the secret

place of the Most High," and "abideth under the shadow of the Almighty."

No one will question that the strength of the Christian is from above, in the ordinary or extraordinary periods of his life. But it may not be so readily acknowledged that the only real power of the worldly man comes from the same source; that, while he thinks himself living upon his own resources, or sustained by the sympathy of others, he is secretly gaining his vigor of soul from a God he does not confess, and a Providence he insults with an impotent contempt.

The man of business and vast executive faculties, who holds the reins of many forms of human activity, and stands the proud centre of an imposing show of material results, is as dependent as the weakest woman upon God; for there are certain conditions of success for him. What would become of all those busy hands and those warehouses full of merchandise if his mind should lose a little of its power of combination and concentration, or his will should relax a little from its tension? The central force of all this machinery resides in his intellectual competency to manage its springs and overlook its complicated movements. And upon how slight a tenure does he hold this power of mind. Why, it is even dependent upon an atmospheric change that, through his body, may in an hour topple down his faculties into utter confusion. And in his healthiest moods does he not depend upon conditions of action which he cannot overleap? This intellect and will

of which he boasts, what is to preserve it active, so that it keep on responding to his call? Only one thing, underlying all, a conscious or unconscious love of God. He must revere truth, or his every success is only a piling of rocks and snow-banks upon an already tottering glacier which impends above him. He must love something, or by-and-by he will awake and find himself God and man forsaken in a world where material splendor is only a shadow thrown from a more splendid humanity. This he feels through the innermost places of his soul, and though he may not be able to grasp the all-comprehending idea of God, or be exactly conscious of what he is doing, he yet clings fast to the Deity in some mode of His existence. He is inspired with the desire to work, the secret cause of much of the activity in the world; and, in his worship of industry, does not see that he is leaning upon one of the everlasting laws of life, and is praising that Maker whose being is a constant flowing into new creation. Or he prides himself upon his mercantile honor; and this veiled image of honor is nothing but the old truth, which is God. Or he is upheld by a vision of years of comfort with his beloved ones at the end of his toil; and, when the noise and gibberish and meanness of the exchange disgust his very soul, he has but to pause a moment and look out over it all into that beautiful land of promise where home, and wife, and children, and useful, calm and harmonious life call to him to bear up a little longer yet; — God speaking to him through domestic loves, and keeping his

heart fresh and undefiled from contact with the soiled hands of traffic. It is only our ignorance which banishes religion from the market and the tumult of this world's activity. Men may unconsciously lean upon their Maker while they make their bargains; and while the upper spheres of their minds are full of confusion and runnings to and fro, one little quiet oratory may remain away off out of sight, where they go in and lock the door, and for an instant melt with a love and glow with an aspiration and trust with a strength which cometh only from one place in the universe; which is the reconciling presence of God; the one thing which saves them from utter wreck; the little spring of life, which keeps green and fresh those active powers by which so many agencies become the servants of their will.

And more evident does this fact appear, when tested by the career and fate of those few men who have been the concentration and idealization of the worldliness of the race; who have undertaken, with mighty energies, upon a world-wide field, to do what so many have failed to accomplish, — live without and in spite of God. Alexander and Cæsar and Napoleon, — each in different ages, and amid different circumstances, — bore testimony to the impotence of man fighting against the eternal truth. Each of these men had a certain faith in which was hidden the life that enabled him to do what he did; a faith which, at times, became a religion and led him to deeds worthy his grand endowments. But trying to rely upon sheer force of will,

to hold together a conquered race, they all failed more signally than ever men failed before or since. The Macedonian left a subject world to fall into disorders more awful than those of any other period of history; the Roman could not find his empire were he to return now upon the earth; and Europe, that for a while bowed under one despot's sword, has now almost forgotten his name. All that these men really did was by virtue of their real hatred of wrong, barbarism, and tyranny. They did break down old wicked nations like avenging angels; but the test of power is creation, and neither of this trinity of the gods of this world has left one token of his creative skill. They stand in history like tall shafts rising above a wilderness of ruins. God used their faith to do his work of destruction; and, when that faith was transferred to themselves, power dropped away, and they shrunk to the wicked, mean, and feeble men they will ever be in the catalogue of the benefactors of humanity.

So it is that in the universe there is but one source of power. Alike the strength of the Christian and the stay of the worldly, God is where life becomes real and productive, and all its glory and joy are from Him alone. Only after we trust in Him can we have faith in ourselves; only leaning down from His supreme love can we dare to give ourselves to others. And our life's question is: shall we deceive ourselves longer by a vain boast of what we are not, and live upon a love we weakly affect to ignore and despise; or shall we take to our hearts this fact of

facts, and once for all give ourselves to Him who made us and whose we are forever? Here, or elsewhere, this question must be decided. Till then, we are only an embodied weariness, weakness and confusion. Only in the Deity are we great with a strength of love that will last forever.

IV.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT.

“ Quench not the Spirit.” — 1 THESS. 5 : 19.

THERE are few written sentences so full of meaning as this, addressed to the Thessalonians by Paul. I would attempt to explain its meaning, and apply the truth contained in it to our spiritual wants.

“ *Quench not the Spirit!*” What are we to understand by this phrase, “the Spirit”? It is a form of expression much in use among theologians and religious people, and often introduced in the New Testament; and there are many explanations of it among the several Christian sects. Without attempting to question any of these theories, I will at once give my own opinion of the meaning of the words, and proceed to that practical application which is better than the ablest controversy.

There has always been a belief among men that the human soul sustains an intimate relation to a higher order of existence, whose presence and influence are not perceived by the senses. Men have supposed that, in this way, they often receive truth, power, and love; are warned against sin, or encouraged to do well, or punished for

transgression, or comforted in affliction. One proof of the reality of such influences is that in no other way can a large class of spiritual phenomena be accounted for. Men are constantly receiving the best mental and moral gifts in a way totally inexplicable upon any other supposition; for they cannot explain the facts by anything they know of mere human agency and influence; and the pretence that the supposition of divine influence exerted over the human soul is a freak of the imagination is no explanation; for this belief does not belong to a few visionary persons. Every human being finds it in his mind, just as he finds the belief in his own personal identity, or in the existence of God, or the immortality of the soul. Savages and ignorant and very depraved people account for it in a way which we call superstitious: they suppose themselves to be surrounded by spirits, ghosts, and demons, who are able to influence their minds. There are some Christian believers who think the same thing. Others believe there is a separate being, one of the trinity, the "Holy Spirit," who is the message-bearer between God and man. And even persons in Christian lands, who do not believe in Christianity, have the same notion, and are ready to show it by accepting various strange theories of spiritual communication from beings in other worlds to the inhabitants of this. Thus we find everywhere the same opinion. History proves that men have always cherished it. Appearing in a thousand shapes,—in the superstitions of the vulgar, the mythologies of Pagans, the systems of

philosophers, the intuitions of moralists, and in its highest form upon the pages of the New Testament; there it is, a fixed, ineradicable belief of man, so deeply imbedded in his consciousness that it cannot be disturbed; the belief, that in some direct way a divine influence is exerted upon the human soul.

The Christian answer to this mysterious question is, that God, our heavenly Father, is always very near the spirit of each one of His intelligent creatures; that He is the source of all the truth, power and love we have; that the consciousness of His presence is excited by many methods; and that, by obeying certain conditions, men can preserve that nearness to Him; by disobeying, can separate themselves from Him.

God is very near every human soul. In saying this I do not limit the nature of the Deity. I only assume that, whatever may be the mode of His existence, He has the power, and it is His pleasure, to aid us in this way. Neither do I say that He is equally near all men. The wicked, of their own accord, may go away from His presence, and the very ignorant and feeble-minded may have only a dim, superstitious idea of His influence. Then the power of appreciating the nature and character of God depends upon the power and combination of faculties, and especially upon the quality of one's moral or spiritual being. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," says Jesus Christ. When a soul, created in noble proportions, lives a sincere and holy life, its sense of the

presence of the Deity amounts to inspiration. It knows more of God and divine things than others, and its words form the religious opinions of mankind. Jesus Christ, originally created far above men, lived so purely and justly that his words and life are our Gospel, and we are sure that he knew entirely the truth which he affirms.

It is true, men often forget this fact that God is near them. They become selfish, passionate, proud, violent, and sensual, and lose their faith in anything except the objects perceived by the senses. This is no proof that God is away from them; only that they are so foolish, weak, or wicked, that they cannot comprehend His presence. But there are many ways by which they are reminded of the fact. Perhaps the most usual mode by which very bad men are informed of it is by the presence of suffering or danger. Such a man, brought near his last hours, or in sudden peril of his life, or deprived of something which he loved, unconsciously thinks of God and is filled with a terrible remorse, as if the eye of Omnipotence were looking down out of the heavens upon him. Souls of a nobler order and in a higher state are otherwise reminded. And a truly great and good man is every moment admonished of his Father's presence. He feels it in the increasing power of his mind, and the remarkable ideas that come into it in a manner he cannot explain; in the quickness of his conscience to approve or condemn; in the strange, sweet experience of affection, its prophetic hopes and

longings, its glad assurances, its intense realizations of union between soul and soul and spirit and its Creator. The life of this man appears to himself filled with evidences of God's immediate relation to him. Events and persons have a peculiar meaning. Nature proclaims the same truth, whether, in spring, her hidden forces are at work filling the earth and air with new sights, and sounds, and odors; or in summer, exulting in the delight of conscious beauty; or in autumn, offering her plentiful stores to man; or in winter, through cloudy and stormy days gathering herself up for a new year's life. So the whole outward and inward world reminds this man of its Creator. He sees God, not with his bodily eyes, but with the eyes of his soul. He lives with God and acts by His direction. His existence becomes a prayer; for whether he utters words of supplication and thanksgiving in the church or in the closet, or is employed in ordinary business, or sits in his own house with his family, or mingles with other men in social intercourse, everywhere he knows himself to be accompanied, instructed, warned, and loved by that Being whom "the heaven of heavens cannot contain," yet who dwelleth in every pure and humble heart.

But this experience is conditional. God is always near the soul; but whether to impart joy, or administer retribution, or to remain there unrecognized, depends upon the state of the spirit itself. For, as the beneficent electric power which gives life to nature becomes a thunder

storm when the atmosphere is impure, and for a time involves heaven and earth and ocean in conflict, that a brighter light and a clearer air may come with the new day ; so does the Father, who is always near us, and nearest when we do not know it, arouse the sluggish and sinful soul by terrible awakenings of remorse, by sorrows and privations which reveal it to itself and call up latent energies to the recovery of its lost nobility. But these visitations of the Spirit are not so fearful as the almost utter deadness of the heart, which has become insensible alike to reproof and inspiration. Against both these dangers it concerns us to guard ourselves. And this we can do by obedience to those conditions which God has appointed for securing to us the enjoyment of His favor.

And the first of the conditions, upon which depends our nearness to the Deity, is *sincerity*. We must have a hearty love for the truth in every person and subject and in every place. We must love the truth because it is of God, and wherever we find it listen to its counsel as if God spoke directly to us. And in our search for it we must be honest ; must not be swayed by favorite persons or opinions, or made partial by our affections or ambition. We must not trifle with other minds, not dispute with them for victory, nor pride ourselves upon overreaching them by our own power or subtlety. In dealing with other men we should only care to find their truth, and increase it by gifts from our own ; not to abuse them by making them ashamed of what they have. Every human

soul we should religiously respect, and never permit ourselves to invade one of its rights, however exposed it may be to the inroads of our more powerful reasoning and force of will. And we must not trifle with ourselves; this is our great danger; not that we cheat others, but cheat our own souls out of their best possessions. We have many faculties,—some weak, others, the most valuable, are, from want of exercise, in subjection to the lower impulses. And we must watch this world within. If the strife of political parties upon which the material prosperity of a nation depends be a subject of engrossing interest, what shall we say of the politics of the soul? There is an "election" impending in the heart of each human being upon which his happiness and welfare depend far more than upon the success or failure of candidates for popular favor. For here the strife is not who shall make speeches and vote laws a few years in the national capitol, but whether the appetites and passions shall dictate to the conscience and the reason; whether the man shall be gaining or losing ground in his journey towards excellence; whether God or the devil shall be ruler over the spirit! How interesting, above all other objects of human interest, is the progress of such a warfare as this! And who will dare to trifle with his conscience, his love of truth, his affections, his sense of the beautiful? Perfect sincerity to others, perfect sincerity to ourselves, brings God near us and keeps him near. Then we know the signs of His appearance; then nature lies open even to its innermost and holiest

meaning; then all that is truthful, good, and beautiful in others is unconsciously and instinctively revealed to us; then the books of men of genius and the deeds of saints instruct us; then the words of Jesus reveal new depths of a celestial wisdom, and blissful revelations of an ever-watchful love.

Yet even sincerity in thought will hardly secure to us these rich possessions without corresponding sincerity and purity of life. We may love the truth and see it very clearly for a time, and yet lack the heroic will, the patient "continuance in well-doing" which makes us one with it and with God. Therefore, a second condition of nearness to the Father is, that we live up to the light He has given us,—at least, never cease trying to be what we most admire and revere. The man who lives constantly below his conscience, and tries to apologize to it or evade its demands, may now and then see heaven as in a vision or a dream; but only he who faces duty, and says he *will* be a true disciple of Jesus, *is* in heaven. There is a holy of holies in the soul where the Father comes down to talk with him who is good; but the key to this sanctuary is purity of life. Thus it is that, by sincere thought and sincere action, we keep ourselves near "the Spirit," and every day receive new accessions of that treasure which all noble souls most need and covet.

But, if it be true that "the Spirit" may, in this manner, be invited, so is it equally true that it may be repulsed, and the soul be consigned to darkness and death.

A man can turn away from God if he will. He has only to give free indulgence to his sensual appetites, in their usual diseased and clamorous state, let loose his wild, unreasonable passions upon himself and others, and live in the dreams of a heated fancy, or the reveries of an untamed and reckless imagination; he has only to love his own opinions better than the truth, and his own ambition better than justice; to invade the sacred inclosures of other men's minds to gain amusement or satisfaction for his own, and purchase present comfort at the peril of future exposure and disgrace; he has only to run away from his own conscience, and stop his ears to the pleading of his best affections, and shut his eyes upon beauty, and avoid the company of good men, and never undo the clasped covers of his Bible; or he has only to give up to his own laziness of will, and let the world rush in and his business drive out the thought of higher goods, and selfish or ambitious men claim him as their friend, and use him for their slave, and human interests rush in, like a flood-tide, and overflow things divine; he has only to do this, and he may know as little of God as he will. It requires a long and determined career of such living to entirely banish Him from the thought; for before the death of the Spirit its Creator appears often in terrible ways of retribution. He comes in upbraidings of the conscience, in cloudiness of mind and soreness of heart, in sorrows, and privations, and sudden bereavements, and startling displays of power and retributive justice. But,

if these are lived through,—and they all can be,—then the soul is left more to its own wilfulness. As a spacious and lofty temple, full of windows opening upon wide prospects, and pictures of saints and rich monumental images, which at mid-day was full of light, as the afternoon wanes grows dim, shadow after shadow stealing along the aisles, and veiling the faces on the walls, and shrouding the statues in the niches and corners, and, when the sun sinks over the hills, is given up to the twilight, till at last the whole space is pervaded with darkness, only a faint gleam along the floor or athwart a pillar telling that the rays of the stars contend against the conquering gloom,—so departs the light from the soul of him who lives estranged from God; his sun goes down, and shadows fall over him, till he has sinned himself away into the cold, dark region of death, illumined only by that promise which sends a beam of forgiving love even down the darkness of the lower worlds,—the eternal hope, that no depth of weakness and sin can quite extinguish.

And while we contemplate this dismal picture of a ruined soul, what a depth of solemn meaning is revealed in the words of the apostle, “*Quench not the Spirit!*” Turn not away from God; for what loss can be compared to the deprivation of the Divine influence, which is given to the pure in heart? What earthly gain compensate for that deadness of soul that lives amidst the glories of the Creator’s presence, and knows it not? O, my brethren! whatever else you let go, never part with sincerity of

thought and purity of life, for these are the guardians of the sanctuary within. Put not off those incentives to holiness which revisit you every day of your life; and dare not, as you love the truth and fear the retribution that comes hard upon falsehood, dare not trifle with, or scoff at, or outrage, your own conscience. Whatever be the highest word it speaks, that go and execute; for your soul is pledged, by all its hopes of peace and rectitude, to do that. And blessed indeed, as the whole world cannot bless, will you be if, living honest and Christian lives, you grow nearer to your Father as the years bear you through your mortal existence. For, when God is your light, your love, your joy and your trust, of whom will you be afraid?

Be it your lot thus to live, and thus to know "the Spirit." And may your feeble striving towards perfection be accepted, and your weakness and want be enfolded in the eternal love, till, glorified by such communion, you grow up into the image of God.

V.

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL.

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” — ACTS 9 : 4.

THESE words arrested Saul of Tarsus in his career as a persecutor of Christians. Of his previous life we have only a few significant hints. We first see him in the crowd that thronged the death-place of the martyr Stephen. “The witnesses laid down their clothes” at his feet, he “consenting to his death.” Then, more enraged than ever, he “made havoc of the church,” and “yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” “desired letters to Damascus.” “And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus; and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”

These words were spoken in the great crisis of his life, for, no longer the persecuting leader, but the terrified suppliant, we hear him cry, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Then, obedient to the Divine guidance, he places himself under the protection of those he lately

wished to destroy, and, after a three years' retirement, comes forth, "Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles."

Yet, sudden as this change may appear, it was so only in appearance. The voice out of heaven spoke at the right moment,—when his soul was ready to respond. Who can tell what thoughts had been undermining his Jewish hatred, even while his rage blazed the most fiercely? How must a nature so great as his, driven into persecution by a mistaken zeal for his own religion, have shrunk from contact with the mean and spiteful bigots associated with him? How must the conduct of those who would use his honest zeal to further their base personal ends have cooled his enthusiasm? How could he forbear to contrast them with the blameless lives, the heroic endurance, and the triumphant death of those Christians among whom he "made havoc?" And could he ever put away from before his eyes that angel-face of Stephen, as he "looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God?" and would not those last words, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," repeat themselves again and again in his ear? What was that very increase of rage but his restless conscience, goading him on to lose in new deeds of violence the remembrance of the old? But all was in vain. No sooner shines the great light than he falls to the earth; no sooner rings the summons over his head than he cries, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Then, even, the work was not completed; for, after this, came the kind-

ness of the Christians, their devotion in saving his life at their own peril, and the three years in Arabia ; and even, long after this, the sad confessions wrung out of his great heart tell us that the foe was not yet entirely conquered. His experience on the road to Damascus was only the turning point in an eventful life. All that he had done before prepared him for it ; his whole future was its confirmation.

Such an event as this, in the life of any human being, is instructive in many ways. But I would only use it now to illustrate the fact to which I have already referred ;—that a crisis in life is never an instantaneous and disconnected occurrence, but the culmination of a long series of previous influences, and, if of any worth, must be followed by a corresponding series of results. This is not the common opinion. Weak people are all their lives expecting a wonderful crisis in their fate, coming without previous warning, like a chariot and horses bursting from a cloud and bearing them up to the heavens. Their restless longings are treated as prophecies of such an appearance. Their duties are neglected, their souls left to the teaching of accident, everything great and good lags and faints, while they await the miracle of deliverance. But to them it never comes. The road of their existence becomes an inclined plane to death ; or, if startling events and experiences break the wretched monotony, they are unprepared to see their meaning, or accept the lesson they would teach to a living soul. The truest crisis comes to

a man when he is absorbed in the pursuit of great and noble ends. Then, as a reward of his faith and persistence, a sudden light shines around him, and he knows where he is to go. And next to this in worth is that which recalls a man to his senses, and forces from his lips the words, "What wilt thou have me to do?" and sends him out, like Saul, repentant, and determined no longer to persecute the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, whether for good or evil, such an event, as far as we can see, is only the last of a long series; and its true history would, doubtless, upset that false popular philosophy which sees only signs and wonders in the world of matter, and strange and inexplicable freaks of Divine or Demoniactal agencies in human life. In the mental and moral experiences of man, and in those outward changes which are a type of the inner life, we may see a proof of this important fact.

In the world of the Intellect no great discovery or great thought was ever the birth of a moment. True, there was a moment when it assumed a form to the consciousness of the thinker, and often the preceding steps have been so imperceptible that he was deceived and supposed it a thing disconnected from all his former existence. But no less true is it that he was led up to it through all his previous life. Could we pass into the mind of any of the men who have blessed the world by the discovery of new truth, we should not wonder so much at the results they had accomplished as at their long and wearisome processes

of thought. We should not see a man lying on his elbow, dreaming and waiting for a God-sent revelation; but a soul awake and alert in the road of investigation; an eye trained to look steadily at an object, when other men's eyelids fell; a patience which only grew by discouragement; a love for truth which no brilliant theory could seduce; the whole force of a mighty soul consecrated to one worthy object. To such men,—Newton, Copernicus, Columbus,—when God knows they have waited long enough, and earned the right to see new things,—the laws of the earth and the universe are revealed. And so in the region of the imaginative creation. I doubt not, the vision of Cordelia floated into Shakspeare's soul in some moment of repose; but was not all his former life the preparation for it? How many women must he have known as no other man could know them; how many times must he have essayed to catch and imprison the flitting lights and shadows of their innermost being; how many bad and turbulent passions must he have lived down; how often must his mighty heart have yielded to an overmastering tenderness at some wondrous exhibition of human devotion; before his eye caught that ideal form which had existed from the creation of the world, waiting for the birth of a Shakspeare to reveal itself to mankind? And who can tell how long and intensely he toiled, consciously or unconsciously, to hold that vanishing loveliness, and transfer its lineaments, and place around it a frame, and behind it a background, in which it might repose

half seen and half suggested? So is every living creation, every fruitful discovery, the gift of God, yet the conditional gift; a crown placed on the head of him who by natural endowment and long and patient toil may deserve it. The miracle is none the less real because it is wrought only for the faithful.

No great moral crisis comes without preparation, or does its work unless its lesson is accepted and wrought into the very texture of existence. How many men and women in the world are dissatisfied with themselves and their position, longing and praying for some hand to lead them up to higher points, where they can breathe more freely! Let all such distrust the hopes and expectations that are born of their indolence and their unrest. If an angel ever comes to them, they must first gird themselves and go out on the road of duty to meet him. Let such an one make the most of his present lot; let him do his work without complaint; try to overcome difficulties, not by fierce onsets, but by patiently looking them in the face. Let him subdue his passion, discipline his imagination, turn out of doors, one after another, his wicked lusts and selfish and proud desires; and if, with all this, he cannot be cheerful, let him endure his sadness, and still work and believe in God. For such an one, a messenger has already left the society of the great and good in earth or heaven, and now approaches unseen; and on some day, when faith can hold out no longer, from weariness of heart, and the sky is one black mass from horizon to horizon,


this faithful one in his darkness shall feel an arm thrown around him, and hear at his side a voice sweet and inspiring, and know that his earthly or heavenly redeemer has come ! Then let him not forget his duty, but, with a song of praise upon his lips, bound forward upon the dusty road, with alternating talk and work and prayer ; and at last along the horizon shall gleam the blue hills, from whose peaks, weary with climbing, he may look off, and dimly see the forests, and fields, and mountains, and bright waters of the kingdom of heaven, and prophets, and saints, and the Son of God walking together therein.

And in the life of nations, which is only a symbol of individual life, the same law holds. No great government ever sprang from obscurity to sudden power, or fell from a healthy prosperity to immediate destruction. The historians of the world, in their anxiety to make the nations live and die dramatically, have neglected the most important portion of historical investigation ; the secret tendencies that culminate in a kingdom's glory or shame. In their pages chance is God of the earth ; a battle turns the tide of civilization, the birth or death of one man accelerates or retards for ages the greatest hope of the race ; the story of humanity is only a series of crises, with no sufficient causes or results. But he who reads history by the aid of spiritual laws, soon discovers that he must think less of its brilliant points, and more of its general and inevitable tendencies. These bright moments of the world's life are only the times when the electricity with

which the social atmosphere is always impregnated sparkles an instant on some sharp point. God is always in the earth, working so fatally that we forget he is here, and call his acts his laws; and, to rebuke our scepticism, now and then he permits us to see a nation spring over its last step to glory, or dispels the clouds that veil its final plunge to destruction. Yet, inspiring and terrible as are these spectacles, they move a deeply religious mind far less than the thought that while the social sky is clear, and all men at their work, their sleep or their pleasure, the nations of the earth are slowly and inevitably ripening for a new day of the manifestation of the Divine will.

Think of the long period of preparation for national retribution. A people permits itself to live in the indulgence of some great sin, it matters not what; it may be an unholy thirst for gain, or a wicked spirit of conquest, or a contempt for man, shown by holding him in bondage, or political dishonesty and corruption, or a disregard of any of those rules of life which are as imperative upon masses as upon individual men. Such a people may go on increasing in prosperity, to all outward appearance. Their occasional sins, unpunished, may pass into national characteristics, and disease become organized into constitution, and legislation, and manners, and popular habits of thinking. In truth, the more fatally the body politic is thus affected, the greater is the appearance of energy for a time. The power of a whole nation of mistaken or bad men will carry along the most unchristian institutions for

a time in the very face of God's justice. And men are content, because no crisis comes. For the reformers call down fire from heaven, and the sky remains blue above; the statesmen predict revolution and popular outbreaks, and the people keep quietly in their fields or behind their counters; all the prayers and imprecations and prophetic head-shakings of priests, and prophets, and social stargazers fail again and again. The Infinite Justice will not "bow the heavens and come down" to shake the earth at the call of any convention of respectable delegates. But all this time the sin, if not repented of, is slowly conquering one portion after another of the social domain. It insinuates itself into the brains of statesmen, and confuses their perceptions of Christian legislation; it vitiates the first principles of commerce, and honor slowly gives way to tact and craft; it puts a quiet contempt into the conversation of the educated when they talk of generosity, and piety, and disinterestedness; it mocks the idea of a noble life from the circles of fashion; and the populace, last of all tainted by it, grows greedy for national success, and unscrupulous in its loves and dislikes; while the pulpit now shows its sense of the approaching storm by a mad and senseless declamation against public sin, and now sinks into the desperation of commonplace, and now vainly tries to feed the public, a hungry giant, clamoring for food and drink, with spiritual confectionary, and gospel meats thinly sandwiched between great loaves of the bread of this world. So it goes on, and because no avenging



arm is stretched out of heaven, the country rejoices. But, at last, in some unexpected moment, a cry is heard in the streets, and lo, the nation lies in its death throes. No one knows when it sickened, but all know it is now dying. No longer can repentance avail; fast-days and propitiatory legislation, all as fruitless as a mad resistance to Providence now. The hour of doom has come, and, exploded into social anarchy, or held fast in the grasp of a tyrant, or cast under the feet of the marching armies of foreign despotism, the national life passes away forever!

This way of God's operation, for which I have now been seeking illustrations, is full of meaning for the direction of our lives. Half the people in the world are putting off *living* from the cowardly fear or more cowardly hope of coming crises in their destiny. Men go on in sin because they are not arrested by swift retributions; and good-hearted people, and sometimes the best men, lose their faith, because the fifth act of the world's drama is so long delayed. But this way of thinking and living is all wrong, and comes of our unrest and ignorance and sin. We do not move through the spiritual life by leaps, but ascend or descend by gradual and easy stages. Now and then we gain a hill-top, where a new and wide landscape flashes upon us, or now, round a sharp corner, we shudder on the brink of a precipice; but these occasional warnings are but the direction-posts that indicate our general tendency. Our only safety is in watching this; in the quiet and sure ordering of every day, in the con-

stant subjection of the bad and the constant exaltation of the good within us.

Far worse than any crisis of retributive punishment to the guilty man is the thought that he is dying in his sins by a slow, unfelt process. It is fearful to wrestle with great temptations, or to bow the head when the air is darkening with the approaching whirlwind of God's judgment. But is not that torpor of the soul more dreadful which precedes all this; that imperceptible weakening of the will, that daily encroachment of the passions, that slow sickening of all the vital powers of the soul, which is going on in thousands who live easily and carelessly around us? Poor men, the true crisis of their life was the moment when their prayers began to lose their fervor, and their arms to weary with holding sin at bay; not that last moment which awaits them far along in the future, perhaps on the other side of the grave. Oh! it is madness to live thus, looking up to heaven, with folded arms, for the appearance of a portent. "*A wicked and adulterous generation seek after a sign.*" Begin, this day, the eternal labor of reërranging your chaotic life, and be content to work uncheered or scared by sudden visitation of redeeming or avenging angels. You may not know at once that the mountain of your sin is being undermined; but have faith, and live up to your present strength, and one day it shall be levelled to the plain, and where was once its rocky base shall run the highway of the Lord.

You, too, who have begun to live as you ought, be not

disheartened because hours of high communion and perfect peace come so seldom. I doubt whether they are given in this world often to any one who is absorbed in the pursuit of a Divine Ideal. Now and then we are permitted to repose a moment amid our striving, and feel within us the rest prepared for those who love God; but this is not the purpose of our living here. And who would have it so, since only through tears and toils and prayers, coming from the depths of the spirit, does any man attain to his best thought and deed? So, let us not depend upon these bright sabbath days, and call the working-time barren. For better than ecstasy, even better than repose, is that faithful trust which *will* not be overthrown by all the world can pile upon it; that unceasing industry which finds a reward in itself; that love for man which no stupidity, no hatred, no levity, and no contempt can discourage or turn to indifference; that love of God which envelops with no stoical armor, but offers a bare bosom to storms and arrows and rough beatings, and smiles from the midst of mortal pains; and, hardest of all, the encounter with daily vexations, and provokings, and sinkings of the heart, and alternations of hope and fear, and uncertainty, and wearying suspense, with unruffled temper and increasing disinterestedness. O, this is *life*, my brother, my sister, uncheered though it may be with much of perfect comfort or abiding peace.

Learn, then, the great duty in this earthly portion of your immortal existence. It is constantly to do your

best thing to make life no spectacle where strength is reserved only for striking parts, but to do heartily and completely what lies now before you. Then, as you need them for warning or encouragement, God will send sharp sorrows and startling joys. But let not these detain you long; your business here is not sight-seeing, but action, or, it may be, patient waiting when your Father takes away the power to act. Whatever of these or other things may be sent, fail not to do them. With every morning's light gather up the threads of your past, and weave a new figure in the eternally unrolling web; with every evening's shadow bless God, if you have been good enough, that with only the thought of his love you have been cheerful and constant another day. So, before and behind will the striking incidents of your experience be guarded; great joy will not upset you, and at a great sorrow you will only pause and bow your head in prayer, and then through gathering tears look up along the road of duty. And your life will at last be gradually lifted into calmer regions, where no loud winds blow, and no lightnings quiver along the horizon; where the sense of God's occasional visitings is lost in the joy of his constant presence; where miracles in the soul cease because existence is all miraculous; and the only change is the free and joyous progress from glory to glory.

VI.

INDIVIDUAL LIMITATIONS IN PHILANTHROPIC ACTION.

“Now, there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit.”—1 Cor. 12: 4.

It is the boast of the most vital portion of the church of our day, that it has realized the second commandment of our Lord beyond any previous expression of Christianity. Philanthropy — the love of man, founded upon his nature and destiny as a child of God and heir of immortality; penetrating beneath character and circumstances to his latent worth, and infinite capacities and possibilities, thus flowing directly from, or being, in truth, a part of the love of his Creator — is the central fact in the best religious life of the present. And we may rejoice at it without invidious comparisons between the church of this and former periods, or any desire to revive dead forms of faith for the new times. If the intense devotion and outward obedience to authority of the Catholic ages are wanting now, it is not because the faith of Christendom has degenerated, but that Christianity, by a natural growth in the world, has reached a point of intimate contact with the lives of men. The enthusiasm

that once marshalled crusading armies, and built St. Peter's, and multiplied saints in the cloister and the desert, now endows free schools and hospitals, and gathers men and women into powerful organizations for the reform of the great evils that weigh upon the life of humanity; and there can be little danger that he who thus loves and labors for man, because he is the "image of God," will forget his dependence upon Him, whose best name is "Our Father in heaven." It does not become us, then, to question, but to accept, this new phase of Christianity, and to recognize in it the power and love of God drawing the race to himself.

It cannot be denied that this new creed of philanthropy is rapidly gathering its disciples within and without the visible church. The best mind and heart of the Christian world; the highest names in the philosophy, poetry, history, eloquence, and practical power of our era, however heretical they may be, tested by old weights and measures, are orthodox here. And a multitude that no man can number are thronging into the new church of humanity, clamorous for work, and eager to become, if may be, apostles in the regeneration of the earth. This somewhat disorderly form of worship is the natural accompaniment of the new birth of a great idea into the world. Every epoch in the religious life of the race is, at first, the spontaneous outbreak of a controlling sentiment from a million hearts,—a spiritual freshet, sweeping away the embankments and enclosures of conventionalism, and rol-

ling on with a fury that makes good people fear the great globe is afloat. But we must not suppose that this is to be a permanent state, or that the grand idea of philanthropy is to be realized through this spontaneous indignation against wrong, and the instinctive effort towards the right. God does not save the world by the acclamation of the saints, or the cheers of the people. This holy fury must get itself under the restraints of law; these wide-swelling waters of sentiment must subside, and run in the channels laid for them from "before the foundation of the world." For there is a law and a method, not invented by man, but imposed by God, which directs and limits things natural and spiritual. The light does not shine out of a blazing firmament, but from one glowing orb, poised at the centre of the solar system. The ocean obeys its tides and bounds, and the winds blow obedient to a command as firm as fate. So must this awakened moral fervor of humanity find out the methods appointed by the Almighty for its manifestation, or it will only spend itself in undirected enthusiasm.

Our first duty, then,—having accepted this fact of philanthropy, and felt within our souls that deep, constant, reverent love for man, which alone constitutes discipleship in the church of humanity,—is to comprehend the natural law of benevolence,—to learn by what mental and moral discipline, in what varieties of position, and by what modes of application, it may become a palpable fact in the every-day life of mankind. Let me now

attempt, in obedience to this obligation, to state and illustrate, not the whole method of philanthropy, for that is, by no means, a work for a half-hour's discourse, but one of the laws, by obedience to which the spirit of love to man may reach its legitimate practical results. The law I have selected as the subject of my present consideration is, *Individual Limitations in Philanthropic Action*.

The apostle Paul, in the words I have quoted for a text, has given a concise statement of this law. "*Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit.*" The spirit of philanthropy cannot be appropriated by any sect, or hidden in any corner of the social world, or engrossed by any special form of benevolent action. It is as deep and wide as humanity itself, and its field of action is as extensive as human nature and life, and broad enough to enlist energies of every variety and degree of intensity. One spirit, everywhere present, it will gladly accept and enfold all men in its generous embrace. And equally true is it that there are "diversities of gifts" among men. There are varieties in quantity of being; for there are large souls and small souls, as certainly as oceans and lakes in the physical creation. There are differences of temperament, by which the force of nature and availability of latent power are tested. There are diversities of endowment, a peculiar mixing of faculties in each man, which separates him forever and fatally from others. And there are differences of culture, which often become so implicated with natural peculiarities that they amount

to the same in a practical estimate of character. And when we add to these the diversity of position and opportunity, we must confess that each spirit lives in a world of its own, as truly as if there were a globe built for its especial convenience. These two facts are to be reconciled. How shall this "diversity of gifts" be adjusted to the one "spirit" of philanthropy? How shall a man know what he is to do as a practical disciple in the church of humanity?

Obviously there must be some limitation to individual action in a field so vast as philanthropy. The man who sees most accurately the whole need of humanity, will not attempt to minister to all its wants. Actual familiarity with society as it is dissipates those dreams of an all-embracing benevolence which charm us in retirement. No man is wise, strong, and good enough to hold the whole moral world, with all its complex relations, in his mind. Concentration of effort is a necessity of human nature, which has never yet been successfully avoided.

This fact being received, that we can do but a few things, the guide to our selection of points for the exercise of activity must be *our gift*. It may not be possible to know why the peculiar mental constitution was given us which makes us what we are; but one purpose of it doubtless is, to qualify us to do special things for the glory of God. The varied work of philanthropy offers a spot suited to each of these peculiar forms of human nature; and he who has the skill to discover his own ap-


propriate situation is inexcusable if he neglect the opportunity it offers for service in the cause of truth. We must do what we can, not what our fancy or ambition would suggest. Looking calmly over the infinite extent of moral obligation, we must at last concentrate our power upon that enterprise for which we are best endowed and circumstanced, and "what our hands find to do" there, "do with all our might."

This course of duty is relieved from obscurity when we understand that it offers, not only the most desirable, but the only possible mode of successful action. We must either do that for which we are qualified, or waste our power. For nothing stands in the moral world which is not well done. Every enterprise mismanaged, every reform badly conducted, must be undone, and await the coming of the true laborer. There may be a few men in the world capable of great versatility of action, but they are exceptions to the mass of mankind. Most of us can only do well in a narrow sphere. Then our labor is efficient, and every blow falls upon its own place. Outside this circle we work by chance. A series of fortunate accidents may, for a time, avert the inevitable result, but failure must be at the end. Thus does God direct our position by the leading of our gift; and, if we wilfully oppose His will, bring our work to nought.

The thing we can do well is, therefore, ours; and the conditions of well doing are, that we work in a spirit of truth and love. Truth commands us to know our own

ability and the facts of the enterprise we undertake. While in ignorance of ourselves, or of what we would do, we cannot act. Were this fact observed, there would be more efficient labor in the world than now. Men are too impatient, too full of conceit or ambition, to look calmly upon the facts of the position they aspire to fill. But they learn at last that only what is done intelligently can endure. Love demands that we keep ourselves disinterested, sweet and pure in our work,—that we speak and act with reverence towards God, and respect to the rights of our fellow-men, and never permit our passions to interpret or confuse the eternal laws of the moral universe. It commands us to labor only where we can preserve this tone of feeling, and to avoid every situation where temptations are too strong for our power of resistance; assuring us that what is not done in the spirit of a love greater than the human infirmity it would reform, will fail. By these conditions, then, we may know when we are doing God's work. If we are clear in our perception of the most important facts in our sphere of action, and are conscious of the ability to meet its demands, and can grow up within it to a manhood constantly increasing in power, beauty and love, then we are at home; otherwise, our place of service is yet to be sought.

I know there is a diseased feeling of obligation in many sincere men, which would deny the truth of this doctrine. It is said that evil must be expelled from the world; and, while so many neglect their duty, it becomes imper-




ative upon good men to assume labor for which they are not specially qualified. It is true, the wickedness of half the race does confuse and somewhat alter the work of the rest; but it cannot essentially change the laws of duty. I must do what I can, because I am able to do only this well. If my neighbor leaves his work undone, I may regret it, may pray to God to put a spirit of obedience into his soul, may persuade him to mend his ways, or encourage another, more competent, to take his place; but if I leave my duty to do his, or assume his in addition to mine, I only fail to accomplish my own, and leave his half done. It is a great affliction for me to see a thousand fields "whitening for the harvest" while their reapers are asleep; but that sorrow must be borne, and my own sheaves bound and gathered in. Then something will be accomplished, however little, which is better than a great attempt ending in nothing. We all need more faith in God in view of the needs of humanity. It is only an assumption of His prerogative to regard myself responsible for all the evil in the world. I was made to glorify Him by a generous, efficient service, based upon my gifts and conditioned by truth and love,—not to oversee the moral universe. He knows the wants of his own creatures, and, if I am faithful, will in his own way avert the peril or injury that comes through the indolence of my faithless brother. His claim upon me is for this use of my gift. In this service I may joyfully enlist, may feel assured of His great blessing, may continue faithful, even unto death.

Within my own sphere I am a prophet to the world. Upon the summit of my own mount of vision I may stand, and blow a strong, clear, sweet blast, to cheer and warn the people below; but when I get up into the region of clouds and whirlwinds, where I am upset and drenched and blinded, and can only writhe upon the ground, and shriek a few wild notes of agony and wrath into my trumpet, scaring or angering all who hear, then the first service I can render to God is, to come down. My gift, used faithfully according to the laws of truth and love, must be my guide. The work to which it points is mine, and no one else can do it so well as I, and woe to me if I do it not. The rest of the universe remains in the hands of Him whose "tender mercies are over all his works."

This truth, which has now been stated, is not only in accordance with reason, but also sustained by acquaintance with human character in its practical relations to philanthropic action. Whether we regard the lowest order of gifts and the humblest class of opportunities, or the endowment and position of the noblest men, we find room, in the wide region of benevolence, for the peculiar exercise of every variety of faculty. — There are persons who, in the present social condition, seem destined to spend life in the simplest kinds of manual labor. Whatever might have been their prospects in more favorable circumstances, they now lack the sagacity and energy to maintain themselves in independent situations. It may be thought that

this class can have little part in active philanthropy. Yet, when we remember that this spirit is love to man, we must change our opinion. For the service rendered by those who labor for others with their hands, is most intimately connected with human happiness, even with the highest spiritual welfare of man. However distasteful to a sentimental pietism it may be, it is true that humanity has a great clamorous body to be appeased before its soul can be moved; and so intimately related to its highest devotional aspirations are its lowest animal needs, that the neglect of the latter may quite suspend the former. Who, then, will say that he whose duty is only to minister to the body and the earthly parts of life cannot be a philanthropist? If his faithful care is withdrawn, and man is left naked, houseless, hungry, or vexed with myriad-sided domestic inconvenience, what becomes of literature, and arts, and senates, and churches, and civilization? His truth and love, in his own position, are felt all the way up through the highest interests of the soul; and his failure "tells" upon the laws that govern, or the poems and prayers that inspire his fellow-men. He needs not greater opportunity, but a larger appreciation of the spirit of love, to vindicate his claim to worthy discipleship. Who of you cannot remember some faithful, loving man or woman, who in this station of life has become so associated with your best recollections, and so necessary to your peace of mind, that only God knows how much that is purest and best in your nature has been developed by the

relation? If the woman who goes in her carriage to give bread to a sick and destitute family, claims the title of benevolent, does not she who shields her from the thousand modes of suffering and annoyance which an ever-watchful simple-hearted love can avert, deserve them too? Even from this class does philanthropy enroll her disciples, and achieve some of her most powerful, though unobtrusive conquests. — And when we rise into the region of the various trades and professions, we find enlarged opportunities for the manifestation of the spirit of love to man. Each of these professions is so interwoven with life's dearest interests, involves such varied discipline of mind and heart for its successful pursuit, is capable of such expansion, and is on every side so environed by spiritual things, that the largest philanthropy may despair to fill the channels it offers for conveying the life of a generous soul to the world. Will that merchant who holds the threads that run all over the world and through human nature; whose ships bear to heathen and barbarians, crews and cargoes that may either become ministers of blessing or cursing, or bring home the styles of dress, manners, thought and civilization, from polished races; whose success is the success of others of his fellow-men; whose hopes, not only of living, but of mental and moral life, are entangled in the issue of his enterprises; whose tone of thought is felt in the church, lifting up or pulling down prophets, and in the halls of state, animating or scaring statesmen, — will he complain that no opportunity is offered him for



showing his love to man? Put a great, good heart into his bosom, and see how every agent of his business becomes a missionary to preach "good-will to men." Place there a little, crafty, selfish soul, and see how commerce dwindles into the thin ghost of its nobler self. Humanity does not ask of him to make speeches, or run about to conventions, or lecture society at the street-crossings; but to feed this glowing inner flame of love to man, and act, silently and decisively, everywhere from its controlling inspiration. — For there are those who, if true to their gift and opportunity, will do the more visible and special work of benevolence,—those to whom mere hand-labor is but a poor drudgery, and whose heads would be in a cloud before noon upon exchange, yet whose minds clear up, whose hearts beat a full and joyous tune, and whose hands and feet have wings at the spectacle of sorrow and destitution; whose natures dilate to angelic proportions in those narrow lanes and dark hovels where crime, and poverty, and suffering hold their appalling rule. And when these good souls leave our houses to carry God's light into realms of darkness, shall we hold them back, or weakly complain that the flame of their zeal was not employed to illuminate our drawing-rooms, and burn out in amateur exhibitions to relieve domestic ennui, or fill the poet's corner of a public religious journal? — And, now and then, not so often as some men think, but as often as humanity demands, one appears whose eyes look through us and our household walls, through the church-

door, and into the heart of the preacher in the pulpit — through institutions, and professions, and laws, and statesmen, and the complex life of nations ; who has lived out common experiences with an intensity and rapidity we can hardly conceive — lived through and beyond their common import ; before whose fatal glance the errors, and weaknesses, and sins of men lie outspread like an open picture ; whose brain is strong enough to think steadily, with all the ghastly and maddening sights, and all the groans, and shrieks, and prayers of wronged humanity blazing before his eyes, and ringing in his ears ; and whose deep, calm love abides at the centre of his soul, though waves of indignation, and hope, and fear, and passion beat against it ; who can speak a few simple words that make us red with shame or pale with fear ; can even cite a nation to a court in which he is sole advocate, jury and judge. Such a spirit does God now and then send into the world — the true reformer — who, leaving other men to make bread, and buy and sell, and feed the hungry, and console the mourners, tells us what we lack, and proclaims God's eternal law to the dull ears of a faithless world. And when he comes, we can well do but one thing — “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand !” We may neglect him, but thenceforth we shall become meaner men ; we may scoff at him, but our curses will burn our own lips ; we may run away from him, but he will see us skulking in China or Siberia ; we may break his heart by our obstinacy, or kill him in our wrath, but after we have

laid him in the new tomb, and blocked the door with a great stone, and set a watch, and gone to sleep, angels will roll away the rock, and the dead will come forth to live forever! Yes, the power of omnipotence is in this man, and to withstand him is to fight against God!—Then above him dwells the saint and poet, who, wrapped in contemplation of the infinite beauty and love, can only talk in sweet rhythmic words, that come floating down into this noisy world to become a possession for the generations. Him we must leave to his devotions and his visions, and believe that man is better served by his inspired prayer and song than if he were toiling and wearing out his sacred life with us in the tumult of every-day existence. Thus does every phase of character and position demonstrate the truth of the great apostle's words, —“*Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit ;*” and we may see a whole generation, each soul, within its own enclosure, busy with an activity flowing from, and returning to the love of man.

But, how can this great work be done while men, as now, overlook these individual limitations, and confuse everything by ignorant or perverse abuse of their special gifts? When a man, whose great animal nature and uncontrollable restlessness point like a destiny towards California placers and unhewn western forests, thinks himself called to summon men and communities to spiritual newness of life, who can wonder that the outpouring of his ignorant and half-savage indignation against evils

of which he knows little, and men he does not know at all, should exasperate the bad and fill the good with sorrow ? When the clear mind and large executive powers and generous enterprise of one who might confer a new lustre on a favorite active profession, is sequestered in a pulpit to mediate between man and God ; or the woman whose soul would grow up into new breadth and power and sweetness as a sister of public charity, must lie groaning under mountains of petty household cares ; or the true reformer and saint are placed where every duty contradicts every natural impulse ; is it strange that philanthropy becomes only another name for confusion and ill-directed enthusiasm, and men are puzzled to understand whether this new doctrine "is from heaven or of men" ? We must learn the *law* of benevolence, and labor according to our gifts, or no miracle will be wrought for us, though the compensating goodness of God will raise up powers against us. And we must let our brother do the same. Let us make proselytes to the spirit of philanthropy, but not seek to multiply images of ourself all over the earth. Especially, let us not visit with unkind and harsh or ignorant censure him who, out of the love of man, acts as he feels and knows to be best for that humanity which is greater than we or our plans, greater than any sin or hope of the race, and which forgets no word well spoken or deed well done in her service.

For, after our wisdom has exhausted itself, we may all be glad to go back to the apostle, and listen to his dis-

course upon the gifts and graces of the Christian life. And we may be assured that this gospel of philanthropy will become "good news" to men only when it is believed and lived as he interprets it. One spirit of love, flowing through numberless forms of character, life and action—a thousand men, neither jostling nor envying nor hating each other, receiving and imparting according to the measure of gifts enjoyed—this is that church for which Paul could find no symbol so apt as the body of Christ—that perfect human form, the temple of the matchless soul that dwells therein. Pray God, my brethren, that you, led by his wisdom and upheld by his grace, may become true members of this church of the present, which, sanctified by devotion and enduring faith, and made a living thing by vital love to men, shall gather into its fold the good of every land, and offer unto its Lord the adoration of a regenerate world.

VII.

TEN RIGHTEOUS MEN.

“And He said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake.”—GEN. 18: 32.

THE author of the book of Genesis, while relating the story of the destruction of Sodom, introduces a conversation between Abraham and the Deity. The patriarch, aware of the Divine intention respecting the devoted city, entreats that it may be spared for sake of the righteous men within its walls. The Lord says, in the words of my text, “I will not destroy it for ten’s sake.” But even ten righteous men could not be found in Sodom; and when Lot, directed by the angels, had turned his back upon the wicked city, and entered a place of refuge, the Lord overwhelmed the whole region by a storm of fire out of heaven.

It is not my purpose now to inquire how much of this narrative may be historically correct; or, whether the Invisible One did really hold converse with Abraham, as is here described, on the plains of Mamre. If the account be, as some say, only an unauthorized legend, it still contains a truth deeper than that of the adherence to mere historical accuracy. The man who wrote that the Lord promised to spare the wicked Sodom for the sake of ten

righteous men, gave the world a very profound thought, and unconsciously anticipated a great truth of Christianity.


For why should that corrupt city be spared for the sake of ten righteous men? They could have been drawn away from it, as was Lot, leaving the remainder of the people to their fate. Only for one reason can we conceive that such a thing should be promised. It were yet worth the while to attempt the regeneration even of Sodom, and ten thoroughly righteous men could have done it. But Lot, standing alone in the midst of that tide of iniquity, could only protest against and then be destroyed by it. So it was that Sodom might be regenerated, that God promised to spare it for the sake of ten righteous men.

Does it seem a thing incredible that a number of persons so small should produce such a mighty result? Perhaps it is inconceivable to one who has never seriously contemplated the wonderful power there is in greatness and purity of character. But to him who knows, it seems a very natural thing. Indeed, to him a little band of ten righteous men appears to be a greater spiritual force than a whole Sodom full of transgressors.

Perhaps we shall be able to understand this truth better if we consider the power which one true soul — man or woman — may wield over ourselves. Those of us who know that we are nearer a good life now than once, can doubtless recall a few of the steps by which we came up from a state of carelessness, and uncertainty, and sorrow, to our

present comparatively hopeful, decided, and fixed position. Can we not reproduce that old state of feeling when life seemed "all afloat,"—an ocean full of drifting continents and islands around us,—when we lived from day to day upon the pleasure, the excitement or the news of the hour; our spirits overcast if a cloud crossed the sun; our hopes prostrated before any obstacle; our activity only feverish, more like the action of a mad than a sane man? O, the long waste of weariness the future offered us; the sighings for by-gone delights, or the unhealthy anticipations of strange good by some miracle to be showered over us by and by! But, while in this sad condition, a person crossed our path that we knew, by unmistakable signs, had something for us. We met; and, after sufficient time had elapsed to brush away the formalism of a new acquaintance, began to discover what he was to be to us. A righteous man, we knew he was from the first; not because he told us so, but that our souls in his presence unconsciously assumed a reverent attitude. In his person, and conversation, and life, we felt the majesty of great principles, and the loveliness of a true and holy existence. We first did homage to this. Our carelessness was arrested; our uncertainty found here a rock in the rolling sea; we felt that stability and beauty, and order did exist; and even our thoughtless hearts learned to worship. But, ere long, reverence failed to satisfy us. We longed to be a part of that truth and love; and he, our new friend, was our mediator. In his presence we began to speak of hopes of which no one

else had ever heard us talk. Aspirations for excellence, that once seemed like beautiful colored clouds afar off in the sunset sky, now came fluttering down before us like strange birds with bright plumage. Feelings, of whose delicacy we were always ashamed, now got themselves utterance in some hour of calm and tender conversation; and gradually one new faculty after another was tempted out of its hiding-place into his sunshine, until we were astonished to find that, in his company, we had been transported to an enchanted land of great purposes, and gentle affections, and the reverent contemplation of noble and good things. O, who does not delight to recall that time when the glories of the heavenly life broke upon his eyes! — when one wreath of mist after another dissolving in the sunlight, and cloud after cloud melting into the sky, suddenly appeared a “new heaven and a new earth,” and, in its gleaming plains, and blue peaks, and still waters, and infinite azure, we saw a type of our life. Yet, only for our inspiration was that grand vision unrolled. Then came the disheartening thought of what we were; then, when we tried to go over and possess our heritage, our strength failed, and we turned back into the desert of our old wandering. Then, first, did we know the worth of this man, our friend; for, when we should have sunk down, tired and hopeless, his was the arm that held us up,—now pushing, now leading carefully, now beckoning from a point above; and his was the voice, ranging through all tones, that called us onward,—now rebuk-



ing so sternly that, in very fear, we ran forward; now singing at our side, as the sun grew hot and the way became dusty; now, with a sound like a burst of martial instruments, rousing all the man in our souls; and now, like the swelling and soaring of an organ harmony, lifting our tired spirits up to a moment of beatitude before the face of God. So all along in our perilous journey has he been with us; in our mirth and our grief; praying with us, and reading and interpreting life at our side; and here we are now, not very good yet; for, since that first day of revelation, our prospect has widened, and our ideal become infinite; yet how different from what we once were! Our faces now set towards heaven, our powers all awake, and our lives newly consecrated every day; our sorrow now only for our failure and sin; our faith, in our better moments, too firm to be washed away by any mortal surge of conflict or trial;—all this, through God, has *one* righteous man done for us. And what work can be compared, in grandeur and permanence, to this regeneration of our careless, uncertain and sorrowful nature?

But not to us alone was confined the result of this righteous man's labor. We, in turn, became mediators to souls beneath our own. As we rose from step to step of excellence, we moved other men more powerfully. The very effort to rid ourselves of sin aroused the sleeping energy of our neighbor; our rejoicing over victory gave him a new conception of happiness; our penitence awoke strange feelings of humiliation in his heart; and every

phase of our spiritual advancement was, in some way, responded to by him. And not to one, but to many, did we thus mediate. Some there were too far off to be strongly moved by our attractions, but even they respected truth and virtue the more because of their conviction of our integrity. And as men came nearer us in temperament, and age, and those thousand indescribable resemblances which constitute friendship, the power increased; while one or two, who were close alongside our heart, felt its every pulsation for good, and followed our leading, proud and happy to be the companions of our great enterprise. So, unconsciously, while we thought ourselves only striving to reach the ideal to which our instructor was pointing, we were giving the bread and water of life to many around us. And they, in turn, must become mediators and dispensers of goodness; and so the impulse awakened by this good man has flowed on like a noble river, widening and putting out arms, and receiving tributary streams, till a whole region is bound together, and made blooming and fruitful by its life-giving waves.

All this can *one* man do. What, then, shall I say of "*ten* righteous men"? Only this, that individual efforts, however powerful, would, perhaps, never entirely reform the world. True, a single soul can be greatly moved but by one soul. It has a strange fear of committees and associations. It cannot consent to be arraigned before the public tribunal in regard to its deepest errors, neither will it willingly receive from any society for the propagation

of virtue, the help which it craves from its own friend. But, when we come into the sphere of public evil, a new element is encountered. There we find sin organized, many-sided, built up by the weakness and wickedness of a hundred generations ; and thus holding communities in its power, many of whose citizens are individually far above it. Against such fearful odds, it is hardly possible that one man, laboring, of course, in a peculiar and circumscribed manner, should prevail. Lot could never have regenerated Sodom alone, for there sin had taken an outward form, had become mechanical and destitute of conscience ; indeed, as now, men of the world scarcely were able in public places to distinguish it from virtue, or that low expediency which is thought by many to be virtue's twin-sister.

Such colossal wrong can only be overthrown by the combined efforts of the good. "Ten righteous men" must unite, and bring their varied energies to the work ; come up to the attack from different points, and employ every method consistent with goodness to overcome the great adversary. By their patient and varied effort at last is found that wonderful thing, an *elevated public opinion* ; and what cannot this do ? To me, nothing so clearly attests the presence of God in the world as the miracles of power accomplished by a christianized public sentiment. It is intangible ; we cannot understand it by computing the separate forces of which it is composed ; we have no rules in the books on politics for its manufac-

ture; but let a number of strong and pure-minded men take each other by the hand, and say, "Now, God help us to do this good work;" and, while they are doing their best, there appears abroad in the community something before which sin hides its head, and the lips of her hireling orators become pale, as the accustomed eloquence refuses to come at their call; and bad men skulk away into corners to do their deeds of villany; and everything impure and sophistical fears to walk the streets, lest around some corner it should come suddenly upon the full, calm eyes and majestic presence of its hated foe and judge! This is God abroad in the world, assisting the feeble strivings of his anxious and obedient children.

And what becomes of Sodom, when goodness in this way gets organized, and assumes a grand form, and walks the streets, now with mild glances, and now with God's lightning flaming from its eyes? No storm of fire out of heaven is then needed to purge the very ground on which it stood; but another fire is kindled there which restores while it consumes, burning the sin out of the innermost souls of violent men; warming the hearts of the cold; and playing in a crown around the heads of the great and good. Thus, in spite of obstacles, does the work of regeneration go on, till no one can despair, even of this most corrupt place under heaven.

This was the lesson, written in letters of flame by that burning city in the old time; that it fell because *united effort* was not to be had within its walls for the cause of

God. A warning to us, who may know, if we will, that only when we consent to grasp our brother's hand, and pray and strive with him, can we hope to beat down those hideous forms of sin which threaten our modern social life. Inspiring to us, too; for since Jesus Christ has lived and died, where cannot be found "ten righteous men" devoted to His service? And what can they not do, with His words yet sounding in their ears, and His divine life and glorious death shining down through the ages with an ever-increasing brightness; with God, too, ready and pledged to enter into their labor and baptize it with his power and immortality?

VIII.

UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS CHARACTER.

“If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.” — MATT. 9 : 21.

THESE words were spoken by the diseased woman who endeavored to touch the hem of Jesus' garment in the crowd, that she might be cured of her infirmity. So great was her faith in the miraculous power of the Saviour that she believed if she could touch his robe she should be whole. The event answered her expectation. A “virtue went out” of the Master, which, in connection with her own faith, wrought a complete cure.

I have not selected this incident as the basis of any remarks upon the nature and operations of the miraculous power of Jesus. That he had this power, and exercised it, cannot, it seems to me, be doubted. In some way, unknown to us, “a virtue went out of him” which healed the sick, cured the insane, and raised the dead. So powerful was the impression made by this superhuman energy, that, as in the case of the woman, people thronged him to touch his clothes and receive strength. He was full of this wonderful gift, and it flowed out, blessing all who were suffering around him.

But I would now speak of this great power of Jesus only as a type of a greater thing which he possessed — his *spiritual energy*. He was filled with love and truth no less than the miraculous gift of healing. Great, indeed, was the command he exercised over the laws of nature, stopping the progress of disease, chaining the winds and the waves, and calling the dead back to the arms of their friends; but greater, infinitely greater, was that mysterious power of character by which he attracted all men to him; that unassuming gentleness of demeanor which revealed the depths of his holy life, charming the beggar by the wayside, binding to him the disciple ignorant of his great mission, touching the affectionate hearts of the women that ministered to him, and even extorting from Pilate the confession, "I can find no fault in this man." This power of spiritual attraction was the greatest thing about Jesus, greater than his miracles or his words, for without it these would have had no meaning. It did not reside in his acts alone, or in his discourses, but it streamed out through these. It gave a beauty and sanctity to his most common act, and a weight to his most trifling expression. It imparted dignity to his manner, and shone in his face like a benediction upon the world. It made his silence more impressive than the conversation of other men. It encompassed him like an atmosphere of holiness and love.

If any one is at a loss to comprehend the nature of this influence, let him try to recall something resembling it,

which he has observed in common life. There are in every community a few persons universally beloved and respected. We cannot account for the fact, for often they do not exhibit signs of great intellect. They make no exertion to attract attention, rather avoid public notice. They are not great talkers, for their distrust of their own power keeps them silent. They may not be furious in schemes of social reform, although their benevolence is constant. They are not heard crying out in the churches, or talking aloud about God, and conversion, and futurity in the streets; in fact, they are so quiet that the overzealous think them indifferent to good things. They do not wear all their sympathies in their faces and eyes, but, while others are filling the air with lamentations, are cheerfully at work. Strange where the charm resides which makes them so powerful, but there it is; and when men are in great trouble they go to them for help; when any dispute is tearing the neighborhood in pieces it is referred to them, and all parties are satisfied with the decision; and when a great public evil is to be overcome, after the brawlers have talked the community into partial insanity, a few hints from them set all things right. People have a different kind of regard for them than for others, a perfect confidence in them; they *know* that these persons are worthy of esteem. They may admire one for his talents, fear another for his money and power, crouch beneath another's dogmatism, weep with another for his sympathetic nature; but, when all others fail, they look

to these as the landmarks of virtue,—as a man, becoming tired of newly-invented patent clocks and watches, throws them all out of his house, and goes back to the old sundial in his garden, which never deceived him. Whence comes this wonderful power? What is it?

It is the *unconscious power of the religious character*. These men and women attract everybody because they *are really good*. They are disinterested; not scheming to exhibit themselves, but thinking of the welfare of others; not boasting about virtue and knowledge, but earnestly seeking it. Their calm demeanor hides a great spiritual energy. While they appear cheerful or indifferent, their souls are lying in devotion at the feet of Omnipotence, or wrestling with trial, or glowing with some new plan of benevolence. They try to conceal their talents and virtues, and the very effort at concealment reveals them more beautifully than they could otherwise have done it. Their words are few, perhaps, but each one comes from the heart, and goes to a heart. They are full of spiritual life and love, and through every limb, and feature, and act, and word do these stream out into the world. We feel that their presence is sanctifying; “if we can but touch their garments we shall be made whole.” We cannot talk with them without being elevated by their goodness and faith; we cannot live in the house with them without being ashamed of our bad thoughts and evil habits. Coming out from the society of low, sensual people into theirs, is like the change from a cellar to a hill-

top in the country. They are great and attractive because virtue is great and attractive. They possess the only reality in the universe, and all men tend to them, as the systems move in beautiful order around their suns.

The power by which all this is accomplished, I repeat, is the attractive power of virtue itself. These people are fully alive with its divine energy; therefore they cannot appear otherwise than great and good. And I wish especially to call your attention to the fact, that *there can be no influence for good where there is no genuine spiritual life*. In exact proportion to our own truth and love will be the amount of our attractive power over others. How vain is the attempt to compensate for the want of reality in the soul by sounding professions or boisterous actions! We have all seen people who try the experiment, for they abound in every community. Their existence is passed in the endeavor to appear amiable, generous, learned, or religious; they warmly invite us to come to their houses when they, at heart, wish us a thousand miles away; they politely acquiesce in opinions, in the presence of a neighbor, which they ridicule behind his back; their indignation knows no bounds at the existence of evils which they will not stir out of their doors to prevent; their conversation is tricked out with the vocabulary of virtue; they surround themselves with the trappings of holiness, while they are cold and mean;—as I have sometimes seen a man build a great house, and make it imposing to the eyes of passers-by, while he lived away


in one corner of it, shivering over a stingy fire, and starving upon the poorest food.

Besides such hypocritical characters, there is a yet larger class who are often excited to a momentary enthusiasm for greatness and goodness. An eloquent sermon, a good book, or the conversation of a great man, wakes them up to a sense of their obligations. But the determination, the sincere love of noble things, the "hungering and thirsting after righteousness," are wanting; and so their efforts are spasmodic. They expect to regenerate themselves by a few violent exertions of the will, or a few extravagant acts of benevolence, or a few unnatural raptures of devotion; but it cannot be done. The heart is not there; the calm, deep, constant love of God is away, and all this beating the air will not bring it to them. Thus, in the expressive language of Jesus, "*Having no root in themselves, they wither away.*"

We cannot long be deceived by such mimicry of religious life. We may be deluded for a time by the magnificent pretensions of the hypocrite, or be upset by the windy enthusiasm of his companion, but there is something at last which tells us that it is false. This something is the want of that attractive power of which I have spoken; that unconscious, winning influence, which always accompanies true worth. When most excited by these pretenders we feel uneasy; their presence is offensive to us. We say they are very pious, but very disagreeable, — an expression which lets us into the secret of the mat-

ter, since genuine piety is always lovely, even when united with ignorance and awkwardness. Their words raise a storm in our minds; they leave no good impression behind them. When with them, we are astonished and overpowered; but away, are surprised that we think so little of them. We feel cross, and wicked, and pugnacious in their presence. Their dogmatism arouses all the Satan in our hearts. People tell us we feel so because we are bad; but we know better; for when a great, good man talks with us, we are calmed and elevated, we become eloquent ourselves, and from the mountain-tops of our high converse look off entranced upon the glories of God's providence and the splendors of life.

But how different is the example of a truly good man! Without pretension or extraordinary exertion, he impresses all around him with a conviction of his purity. Virtue, the living power, is in him, and cannot be restrained from flowing out into others. Conscious of his own deficiency, he courts retirement, and does not pretend to teach; but the life in him "will out." The very attempt to conceal exposes it. Goodness beams in the downcast eye, and love and humility struggle up into the bashful face, and the words, so modestly uttered, thrill our hearts, and the generous pressure of the hand tells us a noble soul directs it, and through this shrinking, trembling veil of flesh, we see a godlike spirit toiling for deliverance, longing to make itself understood, and to enfold humanity in its large embrace. How graceful is the least act of such an one!



How grateful and touching the least expression of interest from him ! A cup of cold water given by him is significant of all the virtues. How beautiful to confide in such a man, to throw yourself upon his generosity, and gradually to penetrate the walls in which this rare virtue is concealed, and draw forth, day after day, something new from his storehouse of spiritual riches ! Blessed, indeed, is he who has such a friend ; who can be admitted into the sanctuary of a great and good man's spirit ! Then friendship has a meaning. Then do we understand the work we have to do for each other. Such a friendship was that of Jesus and John. Such a blessed privilege was given to Mary, when she sat at the feet and looked upon the face of her Master.


I have said this great power is the attractive energy of virtue ; for we must never forget that holiness is God in the soul of man, and is the most charming of all things. I know we are told that vice is attractive, even more agreeable to the nature of man than virtue. Many good men say so ; and yet, if they knew it, this is blasphemy ! Vice more attractive than virtue ! Why, the only power of wickedness lies in its hypocrisy. It steals the robes of goodness, and for a time deceives men with the cheat, until their reason is lost and their hands tied. They do not follow the sin but the appearance of holiness or happiness. — And then, there is, in a certain stage of transgression, a disease of the will which almost forbids return to a true life. — There are causes enough to account for the

prevalence of irreligion without such a libel upon virtue as this. For if love is not the greatest attractive power in the universe, we may as well give up all hope, and let things rush down again to chaos. If evil is as charming as we are told, then two infinite powers hold creation in alternate possession; then are there two Gods, Satan and Jehovah; then is eternity only an everlasting conflict between good and evil, and the final triumph of love is only a triumph of conquest, and the throne of God will eternally rest upon the ruins of half his spiritual creation! No, no; virtue is not so weak a thing as this; for even in hearts of clay, in a world of temptations, it is the greatest of all; and when it culminates in a rare soul it draws the world after it, and leads it upward in the slow but sure ascent to heaven.

I wish that I could portray a character of the kind I have mentioned, that you might hold the picture in your minds, and become better by contemplating it. But the difficulty is, that the charm and life of such a spirit cannot be described; and its outward manifestations are unimportant without this. Yet would I attempt it, for I have known many such people, some possessing this spiritual attraction in a greater, some in a less degree; and I have learned from them more of religion than from my books of theology.

I remember one such person — now a man of sixty — whom I knew in my boyhood. He was a plain, modest, industrious farmer — a man of few words, hospitable and

kind, to a proverb. I can remember, when I was a boy, sitting in the gallery of our country church, and looking down into his face. There was a "good look" in it. I did not understand much of the sermon that the parson was repeating over his head, in long divisions and subdivisions; but a sermon was all the time passing out of that worthy man's countenance into my soul. He was the superintendent of our Sabbath school, and when he read the hymns and prayers his voice shook, and the book in his hand trembled, from excessive diffidence; but now and then a tide of emotion would pour out, and bear up the song and the petition to heaven, and we felt the tears gushing out from our eyelids. When he spoke in the Lyceum, all the boys were awake, and all the women stopped knitting, and all the men had that look of contentment which says, "Now the right thing will be said." He was Justice of the Peace, and his house was besieged by those who came there to find justice, and who got it. He was appointed to settle estates, and women and children would walk many miles to entreat him to borrow the little money they had earned and wished to save. When he was a candidate for office, all the party machinery was useless, for he "went in" by acclamation. Thus he lived, always trying to retire, but always pushed on to more labor by a community that knew his worth. Since those days, he has received higher honors; and wherever he has been, love and reverence have waited upon his steps. He was a good man; but if I were asked to describe the qualities



which most distinguished him, I could not tell you. All I know is that, plain and unpretending as he was, a look of peace was in his face, and an atmosphere of gentleness was around him, which won everybody's heart.

And, since I have become a man, it has been my privilege to know another,—a woman, now in the decline of her days. When I first saw her in her household, surrounded by her husband and children, I felt that I was in the presence of one who had seen the face of God. That look of perfect peace, that high composure of soul, that sweet and venerable blending of dignity and humility, revealed a spirit made pure through suffering. And so it was; for she had known trials which would have broken the hopes of many of those who are called great; trials of labor through long years of checkered life; trials from the sin of the world, and the sight of wickedness in its most loathsome forms; trials in the education of a large family, which she sheltered from a corrupt moral atmosphere, till they all grew up the pride of her heart, not one lost or tainted; and all this done without loss of temper, without loud talking; for one pleading glance from her, or one tear upon her cheek, would restrain her children even upon the brink of transgression. Since I first saw her, in her old age, cares have thickened around her. Health has failed, and, one after another, husband and children have gone away from the world, and yet her house wears no look of desolation; the cheerful smile, the welcoming voice are there, as of old, and she moves about, neglecting

no duty, calmly waiting to be called home. Her life is richer and higher every year. Every new affliction makes her more quiet and confiding. She is love and faith. O, blessed is age when it comes to such, whom a long life has not taught contempt, whom departing friends have not left in weakness and sorrow, whose "lives are hid with Christ"! Full of holy influences are they when living, and death comes upon them gently, as the twilight closes a summer afternoon, gliding off into deeper and deeper shadow, till night falls upon the earth; but day is dawning in the worlds above.

This fact I have attempted to present is worthy to be remembered by us all. It teaches us that nothing short of actual goodness will meet the demands of God's law; nothing but sincerity qualify us to influence the minds of others. It oversets all hopes resting upon a ceremonial religion, a superficial culture, or a reputation founded on popular approbation; for all these cannot long disguise the quality of a man's heart. And it assures us that, if sincere lovers of God and man, we need have no apprehensions about our power to do good. When we are in doubt upon this matter, we may study our own characters, and if a strong regard for holiness and benevolence is found there, we need not fear that we are living in vain; for these qualities cannot be hid, but will manifest themselves by the very instinct of their nature.


There is a class of persons who greatly need the encouragement to be derived from this truth. They are people

who have little confidence in their own talents or power of doing good. They appear so weak to themselves, the Christian virtues they have seem so insignificant in comparison with those they have not, that they despair of making the world better by their exertions. They look upon those who possess brilliant gifts and occupy stations of wide-reaching influence, and long for the ability and opportunity to do great works. They can see no special field where they are called to labor. Then a restlessness comes upon them, their courage fails, and they lapse into that melancholy state of mind, a feeling of utter unworthiness and inefficiency. It seems to them as if they were forgotten by God, and were living only to try the patience and burden the charities of men. I do not know any affliction so great as this. It is hard to be tempted, or persecuted, or left alone in the world; but the bitterest cup of all comes when, in moments of despondency, we feel that we are doing good to no earthly creature.

But, my friend, let me tell you how to sustain yourself in such a trial. Begin, first, to examine your own heart; and when you know it thoroughly, cast out every evil thing that lives there. Then forget yourself; throw away ambition, spurn every vicious indulgence, cease to live for the sake of "creating a sensation," and, going down to the plain and pure level of a good life, dwell there in contentment, doing the things which present themselves to you "with all your might." This is not a very easy work; for, if we knew it, most of our discontents and repinings

come from our selfishness, or from a latent desire to attract the attention of men. All this must be crucified before we can influence others for good. Yet, if we can attain to this condition of disinterestedness, and contentment, and faith, we may be assured we are not living in vain; for our example will be greater than eloquent words, and men whom the lights of the world cannot attract will follow the mild gleam of our taper, and be led to virtue. We shall not know the good we are doing; it is not important we should; but every kind smile of ours shall go down into some bereaved heart, and every word of sympathy shall encourage some tired spirit to brace himself for a new conflict. The little things we say and do out of our pure intentions, shall go on, becoming greater and greater, as a low whisper in the gallery at Rome runs on increasing to a voice of power. Those things which we scatter every day, unconsciously, along our path,—good impulses, cheerful thoughts, firm resolutions, deeds of kindness,—are not lost; for God takes them into his care, and each one becomes a missionary in the regeneration of the world. Never distrust your own power to do good, if you *are* good. Be concerned only for the latter, and the former cannot but follow.

For God surrounds his chosen ones with a spiritual atmosphere of light and love. Have you never entered a room to look upon a beautiful statue, and marked how it consecrated the place? Vulgar men uncovered their heads before it, and levity was checked, and the foolish



seemed inspired by the sight. No one could speak aloud, but all stood gazing upon the heavenly face and form,—the low breathing, the tear, or the silent pressure of the hand, the only tokens of approbation. So is it when we come into the presence of a great saintly nature. We are awed and elevated, and changed insensibly to its likeness, and imitate its purity and faith, and strive upward to the summit of its thought. In such an atmosphere does God envelop all true souls. It goes with them, invisible, but separating them from the mass of sensual beings. In such a cloud of glory moved Jesus of Nazareth; and men followed him, they knew not why, and clung to his garments to receive strength. So walked he with his Father through his brief existence, and then ascended to heaven, leaving a name above all others known among men, and a memory that shall regenerate the world.

IX.

GLIMPSES OF HEAVEN.

“But Stephen, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”—*Acts 7 : 55.*


THE chapters, from which this passage is taken, contain the narrative of the trial and death of Stephen. His enemies, unable to “resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake,” suborned men to testify against him; and “stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes,” and “brought him to the council.” And while these false men were lying about him, “all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” And the high spirit that gleamed through his features then spoke out, and he talked to them until “they were cut to the heart, and gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” The louder raged the wrath of his foes, the calmer became his spirit; for what had he, as he stood there bearing witness to the truth, and seeing in spiritual vision the glory of God, to fear from the whole world? They

dragged him out of the city and stoned him, "saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Is not this vision of Stephen a type of a great fact in the spiritual life? Did ever a man nobly testify to the truth, nobly live, and act, and suffer, to whom the heavens were not opened, revealing the glory of God, and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God? Have not all good men, who have lived upon the earth, caught these glimpses of heaven in the highest hours of their existence? Not, perhaps, by visions seen in the sky, not by voices heard out of the darkness, not by portents in nature, or revolutions in life, have they been inspired; but, when they have reached the summit of their thought, suddenly have opened before them gleaming paths to higher truth, which seemed to scale the heavens; when their souls have been full of love, they have heard afar off, like the faint sound of an approaching ocean tide, the coming of a love, deeper and more divine; and when their weary hands have fallen by their sides, and, overcome by the violence of wicked men or the sorrows of life, they could only "look up steadfastly into heaven," a new and wonderful power has flowed into them, and, removed in spirit from the storm around, have they lived in patience, or, like Stephen, prayed and fallen asleep. To every man who has lived a true life have come these celestial tokens of approval and

encouragement, in ways as varied as human character and circumstances, yet always known to be from God.

And what a place would this world be, if such glimpses of a heaven above it were not granted to us ! We say that the earth is beautiful, that life is sacred, that truth is priceless, that love is divine ; yet they are so only by a derived glory. The ocean might roll, and the grass wave, and the wind bow the forest trees, and the flowers blossom, and the river gleam between meadow banks, and the mountain lift itself above the plain ; but what were all this grandeur and beauty could we not look up to the stars, and know that above, and beneath, and around us reposes infinity ? The labor, and joy, and sorrow of life might go on, yet where were its sanctity if there were no life beyond the grave ? Truth might tempt our curiosity, but it becomes inspiring only when it is shown to be more enduring than generations and worlds. Love were no more than the fondness of the brute, or the momentary blaze of passion, did we not believe it were stronger than time, and change, and death. Yes, we love this world, because beyond its horizon lines lies another and a better ; and we reverence the work, the thought, and the emotion of which its life is made, because they take hold on realities that are eternal. Assured of this, we are here content. We are willing to toil through the long, hot summer's morn and noon, if, at the cool of the day, we may hear the voice of the Lord God among the trees. We will think, and love, and do all things, and suffer all things, if



our Father will now and then reveal himself to us, and show us how great is our nature and duty, and how glorious our destiny. We can stand up with joyful assurance, and look upon danger and death with the faces of angels, if, in the hour of peril, the clouds may once be rent, and the heavenly land gleam out between. With God loving, and duty inspiring, and the immortal life awaiting us, why should not this world be beautiful, and life sacred, and truth priceless, and danger and sorrow of no account, in comparison with that joy and peace which the Creator has laid up in store for those that love him ?

And these glimpses of heaven are not withheld from us. They are given to men when living in the way of duty. They come to the philosopher, the artist, and the poet, to him who dwells worthily upon the high places of thought, or sounds the depth of the human soul, or, with reverent spirit, seeks to interpret to man the beauty of the universe. In the way of duty they come. There are lonely and solemn hours spent with thought, when truth has just sunk below the horizon, leaving enough of its radiance in the clouds above to lure us on to its pursuit; when the toiling mind, reposing at last in a conclusion, which it fancies will explain a portion of the great mystery around, discovers that its own weariness had cheated itself with a belief in the permanence of its acquisition, and after this solid foundation has passed away, finds itself drifting again through space; then, if that soul be reverent, it bows down, and owns that there are things

which its vision cannot comprehend; and then comes to it some happy intuition, some explaining principle, enough to refresh its strength, and beckon it on to farther toil. And thus is man kept from utter scepticism; for, whatever uncertainty may belong to his knowledge, he has always in store this divine hope, this unexplored land which he has just discovered.

And the poet, who has made his soul a pure mirror for the facts of nature and life, who has been content to lift himself up to the "height of some great argument," by years of communion with genius, by wide and intimate knowledge of the human heart, by self-renunciation, and temperance, and piety, and benevolence, feels often, when he approaches his work, that all this sacrifice and discipline has been for nought. Then, as he stands awed before the unapproachable beauty and grandeur of his ideal, and can only "look up steadfastly into heaven" in silent prayer for aid, he feels dawning within the power to do what he has imagined, and invisible arms support him while he writes words that will live longer than the world. Whenever or wherever a man consecrates himself to a great purpose, and feels that the best thing he can do is little enough to give him the right to pray to God for aid; the help comes, and by these glimpses of the world of spiritual realities is he reconciled to the limitations of mortality. So do those who dwell on the high places of our existence, often see the heavens open, revealing the glory of God.

And not alone in the elevated walks of existence do men




receive these inspiring tokens of Divine approbation. Common life is cheered by them, and the difficult and vexatious labors of the exchange, the field, and the household are thereby lightened and consecrated. It is of little importance what a man does, if he brings to his work a high purpose, and an enduring patience; for these virtues, in any sphere of action, will command a blessing from God.

The Christian man of business has glimpses of heaven; and surely he needs them to lift him above the trials and temptations of his lot. That constant intercourse with material things, that daily spectacle of selfishness, that hourly exercise of caution, that resistance to the interest of other men, that desire for wealth which, unless kept down, becomes a fever in the blood and a madness in the brain, that insane haste which drives men about the street as if the ground would sink under their feet, should they pause a moment; here are temptation, and confusion, and trial enough to test the worth of any human spirit. True, this is found in connection with much that is great, and generous, and religious. But still it exists; and were there no higher influences around a man of business than those of the exchange, we might well despair of his deliverance from the slavery of this world.

But see how God provides for the encouragement and safety of those who, in this sphere of life, would do His will. The most selfish man cannot entirely cut himself off from contact with things disinterested and elevating. He may arm himself in triple steel, and determine to have

no friends who shall stand between him and his gains, and walk about the streets like the embodied spirit of trade; yet there is always one spot in his armor through which an arrow from the citadel of truth or love can reach him. He is unconsciously melted by some tale of distress, or a terrible social wrong blows his dying spirit into a flame, or a failure in his plans teaches him his dependence; and, when his wife or his little child lies sick at home, he feels, in the midst of his warehouses and his ships, how poor a thing is all the money upon earth compared with one throb of a loving heart. And each of these events opens a way of escape from his selfishness. He cannot, if he will, destroy his humanity; for God comes every day, and knocks upon his iron mail, so lightly that no one else hears it, yet does it sound through the depths of his soul, as if a peal of thunder had rent the cope of heaven and shaken the pillars of the earth!

And if these calls are obeyed, and the man resolves to live more for others, and disentangle himself from the toils of selfishness, then are they heard oftener than before. A joyful presence goes with him now, and there is a new vigor and elasticity in his step, and a smile upon his face, and a light in his eye, and an inviting courtesy in his manner. His mind is clear, and he discovers how much the toil of business is lessened when a man has determined to walk straight forward to duty. Success does not inflame him, failure does not discourage him; and, if any one is so unfortunate as to wrong him, he feels that the



money was well exchanged for the consciousness of honesty and manliness which fills his soul. And if he becomes involved in difficulties, as all good men sometimes are, and begins to doubt the providence of God, and the truth of man, and feels as if it were foolishness longer to hold out against the raging tide of wickedness, he is assured, in some way, that God is yet in his world ; that man is not entirely reprobate ; that sin is growing violent only with the fury of a dying monster. For, driven about by many winds of fortune, at last his feet rest upon a spot high above his former life, and a wide expanse stretches below, and over him reposes a deep blue heaven ; and, while all men seem given up to sin, one comes to him with a nobler purpose and a more generous confidence than he ever before saw ; and while he is in despair for the appearance of a good time, a shudder runs through the great fabric of a selfish social state, as the pillars upon which it rests sink into the centre of the earth. And what are all these, warnings to the selfish man, and inspiring omens to the Christian, but glimpses of heaven, given by God to strengthen and console his toiling children ?

I might go on and say how, in other conditions of life, good men are inspired by visions of heaven ; how, in the midst of sorrow, a strange peace comes over the spirit, and a thought of God, in which the sense of personal loss is borne away ; how, in the perilous hours of a nation's life, the God-fearing statesman is gifted with a sagacity which rises to intuition, and an eloquence which becomes

prophetic ; how, amid flickering flames, shine out the calm faces of saints about to go to their reward ; how, in all the best hours of life, God draws near the soul, and fills it with a sweet and solemn faith, and arrays it with a power greater than the ills and evils of this mortal state. But rather would I entreat you to reverence these celestial omens, and live worthily, as becometh men whom God himself invites to holiness. And, brethren, do not confound these divine warnings and inspiring omens with the dreams of the indolent and unspiritual. It is easy to fold our arms, and let fall our will, and shrink away from mental toil, and avoid that effort which benevolence demands, and, all the time, cheat ourselves with fancies and air castles, and live in a world of sentimental feelings and dainty preferences. These are not glimpses of heaven, but the pictures on which a fond, weak imagination gazes, while death is creeping over the immortal spirit. No, idleness, and selfishness, and weakness are never inspired. To them come awful visitations, the sense of guilt, the fearful "looking for of judgment." Only into the souls of those who lift their own hands does strength flow from on high. Only to Newton, in his highest hour of thought, comes a vision of suns and systems moving in sublime order through heaven ; only to the spiritual gaze of Milton, at the end of a life sanctified by all great and generous discipline, is removed the veil that hangs between the temporal and the eternal. Only to Stephen, after he has toiled, and suffered, and prayed, and borne high witness to the truth in the

presence of his enemies, does heaven open, and Jesus Christ appear standing at the right hand of God. To him alone who lives above this world, come gleams and tokens from another.

My brother, dwelling in wickedness, heed these warning voices, out of all things calling thee to a higher life. Strive to go above thy selfishness and thy sin. Think, and love, and work, and pray. Then shalt thou know that thy Saviour is not afar off; then shalt thou, before thou fallest asleep, behold the glory of thy God.


X.

SINCERITY.

“That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.”

EPH. PHIL. 1 : 10.

THE apostle Paul, writing to the church at Philippi, desires, in the beginning of his letter, that these blessings should especially be given to his friends,—“That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” Such a wish was indeed worthy the apostle, for it comprises the beginning, progress, and result of the Christian life. *Love*, “abounding more and more,” awakening the desire for holiness, and unsealing the eyes of the understanding to “knowledge and all judgment;” then, *Conscience*, “approving things excellent;” and, as the crown of all, and essential to the “being filled with the fruits of righteousness,” *Sincerity*, keeping the soul pure of evil, holding the reins of the passions and appetites that would upset the will.



And very justly did the apostle place this virtue of sincerity in so important relations; for upon it are founded all excellence of individual character, and all stability in social life. A man is nothing unless sincere. In proportion as we know from himself exactly what he is, does he win and deserve our confidence. And a state could not exist a day whose citizens had lost confidence in each other's integrity. In every word we speak, and every act we do,—yes, in every thought, sincerity in ourselves and others is unconsciously assumed.

It is not strange that this should be so. For sincerity is nothing less than *truth*. It is, in its highest form, the instinctive gravitation of our whole nature to what is great, good, and beautiful; the joyful response of the human soul to the Divine perfections. In a somewhat lower signification, it is the striving of a man to put away dissimulation and disturbing agencies to a noble life. In any worthy meaning of the term, it is the purification of the motives and the consecration of the powers of our being; the thinking, acting, and speaking up to our highest comprehension.

There is a sincerity of thought and feeling which underlies all manifestations of this virtue. A man is sincere, in the best sense, when he thinks and studies only for the sake of obtaining the truth, and loves what is deserving his reverence and affection. Every mind is exposed to the influence of perverse and brilliant theories, and obstinate prejudices. These take possession of us; and, before

we know it, we are not seeking after truth, but trying to discover facts to sustain our preconceived system, or to reconcile the universe to our personal conceits. Then, our affections are seduced by objects that appeal to our appetites, vanity, and ambition, or the lower passions and faculties. We yield to the drunken joy, and drift away from holiness through our impulses and moods. Sincerity forbids all this. From its throne, in the centre of the being, it chains the intellect to a loyal obedience to truth; holds steadily before the impetuous affections the image of heavenly purity, and directs the imagination towards the Infinite Beauty.

And when sincerity sits thus upon the throne of life, it controls not only the inward but the outward man. It makes his action a genuine representative of his best thought and feeling. Instead of floating through indecision, and discussion, and feeble expediency, he simply and naturally acts out his best thought, and follows the noblest direction of his heart. He distrusts all novel methods of virtue, all "short cuts" to heroism. He knows what is the highest thought in his mind, and what his conscience, speaking most clearly, tells him to do; and all his life he is striving to bring his actions up to this standard, in opposition to obstacles from selfishness within or temptation without.

This purity of action passes into his speech, which is itself, in truth, a very noble style of acting. This man does not talk to astonish, to seduce, or overpower men, or

to exhibit his own mental furniture to himself. When a great truth comes and waits for expression, and points to a world waiting for its utterance, he opens his lips. When a deep sentiment of thankfulness to God arises in his heart, from the street, from the church, or from his bed goes up a silent prayer. When his whole soul leans towards a fellow-creature, he trusts the instincts of his better nature, and sends to that brother words of endearment, encouragement, and consolation. When beauty in heaven or earth, or in the face or spirit of man, inspires him, he is not ashamed to be, for that moment, a poet. And his pure and joyous mirth goes frolicking before the very face of conventional decency and stately imbecility, and gives a spring and a laugh for every frown and shaking of the head. So does his conversation express the purest and noblest part of his soul.

And thought, action, and speech of this kind do not pause until they have moulded the outward form to their likeness. When we look into the face of this man, we know he can be trusted. In his carriage and deportment is seen that grace which is born only of the Christian life. All the rest of the world are trying, by contorting their faces and assuming postures, to coax beauty into their persons. He lives a noble and simple life, and a diviner beauty comes to him than they conceive, subdues all hardness of feature and stiffness of form, and the man is transfigured before us. So through this outward veil

do we look in and see the soul that God has made his own.

Such is perfect sincerity,—“Truth in the inward parts,” truth in action, truth in speech; all revealed through manners at once natural and beautiful. But, alas! only one being has yet realized this ideal. Yet, in many good men, we see it in fragments, and it gleams through our common life often enough to make us hate its counterfeits, and deplore its absence.

I surely need not speak here of its utter loss, or try to picture a soul given over to insincerity. But it seems important that two methods of departure from a virtue so essential should be noticed. These I will now consider. One is, that insincerity which consists in imitation—the trying to think, act, talk, and appear above ourselves, because there are souls above ours. The other is the insincerity which is entertained in some minds as sincerity,—that spiritual incontinence which consists in acting and talking out indiscriminately everything, good or bad, which the Holy Spirit or the Father of Lies may put into the soul.

Imitation,—the striving to think, act, and talk above oneself,—is a more common vice than we may suppose. For it not only appears in the form of troublesome vanity, pretension and hypocrisy, but is often almost unconsciously assumed. All men agree to condemn a notorious liar and hypocrite,—one who falsifies in facts, and pretends openly to be what he is not; and time would be wasted

in exposing the weakness and sin of such a person. But there is a class of people, much more numerous than this, who violate sincerity in a more fatal manner, and succeed, not only in deceiving others, but half cheating themselves. It is composed of men and women who adopt conclusions to which they have never arrived by any mental or moral process of their own ; who imitate the outward actions of those who are really great and good, thinking that by this method they gain a fellowship with them ; who talk fluently about the most sacred and abstruse topics, in a manner that proves they have never obtained the first true conception of their magnitude ; and, as the crown of their unconscious hypocrisy, conform in their manners, as far as possible, to the deportment of the saints.

The grand error of such persons lies in confounding the "spirit" of excellence with the "letter." They have been taught to yield a formal respect to what is great, good, and beautiful, and they really feel this respect, to a certain degree. But, from original weakness of nature, or miseducation, or oftener from the selfishness of their own hearts, they suppose the highest things in life are to be obtained by imitating the forms they assume in their worthy disciples. So they spend their days in a region of falsehood. Their opinions do not belong to them ; their actions are like cold meats served the day after a feast ; their conversation is neither natural nor inspiring ; and their manners repel us by their mechanical precision, and want of adaptation to circumstances and persons.

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I suppose we must all plead guilty to this sort of hypocrisy in a degree. Few of us have not, at some time, been in the disgraceful position of believing, acting, talking, and appearing above ourselves. An honest man cannot easily forget such times, and will gladly escape the humiliating recollection of them. And it would be unjust to accuse any man of living entirely in such an atmosphere. In truth, in the soul almost given over to this self-delusion, there is always one living spot,—a sense of dissatisfaction, or a consciousness of insincerity, —strong enough to build a hope of regeneration upon. But have we not often seen the man whose life was, as far as possible, such an organized lie,—who had succeeded in cheating half the world, and half cheating himself into the belief that he was the “ideal man”? He talks of God, life, duty, and immortality, as if he knew no doubt upon such themes; and woe to the unhappy man who confesses before him that he does not see clearly through the whole universe; for he goes away with the brand of “heretic” on his brow, or with his faith yet more confused by the superficial philosophy of his omniscient instructor. He imitates the outward acts of holiness, is strictly honest, and severely righteous, and punctilious beyond other men in the observance of the Christian proprieties. He supposes himself a believer in all that is necessary to be believed. And his manners are the admiration of the critical in such matters. But, for some reason, all this does not satisfy us. Are the God,

the life, the immortality and the duty, of which he talks so confidently, realities? Can it be that his vacant eye has pierced the eternal mystery? No. There is a God, but not the one with whom he is so familiar. Life, immortality and duty still exist, and inspire the hopes and test the faith of saints and prophets; but not his formalism, his existence, and his future. And beyond the horizon of his world of thought lie all grand and holy things. His money given in charity freezes the beggar's hand; his entrance into God's house darkens the windows; his prayers and exhortations make sinners rave, and good men weep, and half lose their faith. Legislation becomes a farce, and commerce dwindles to traffic, and social intercourse becomes an exchange of compliments, when he leads. He empties life of its beauty and glory, and from such as he the "whole creation groaneth to be delivered!"


Now there is a way even for such a man to return to sincerity. I grant, the first step must come from without himself, in the form of humiliation and affliction, or from the secret influences of God's Spirit within, blowing into a flame the dying embers of his nobler life. But when this impulse is given, let him follow out his convictions of sin; let him submit to his disgrace; and, when humiliation has done its perfect work, and left him stranded upon the barren shore of his own individuality, then there is hope. For if he will consent to live a while in this vale of obscurity, and then revise his opinions, become natural in

his actions, talk only of what he knows, and behave modestly, he will by-and-by find himself upon the true road to excellence. Only through this gate of sorrow can such a man hope to enter that path which leadeth to eternal life.

Widely different from this form of insincerity is that which I am now to describe. This consists in living chiefly from momentary impulse. Such a person thinks and studies only by jerks; remains where one wave of feeling has lodged him till another bears him away; acts out all his moods; talks of everything that enters his mind; and in his manners corresponds to the caprice of his inner life.

This is an error into which very noble natures are apt to fall. For they often know that many great and good things they have done have come from a sudden intuition or impulse, acted and spoken out fearlessly into the world. And from this the transition is somewhat easy to believing that all thoughts and feelings should in the same manner be expressed. It appears to me that this evil is increasing in our midst, and doing harm to many people who were made for better things.

The unreasonableness of this line of conduct will appear at once by referring to our definition of sincerity. It consists in the purification and consecration to truth of the inner man, and the acting and speaking up to the *highest* thought and feeling. Now I suppose even the class of people I have named will agree with me that a



man should never cease trying to enlarge his opinions and purify his motives and his taste. To stop doing this is the worst kind of insincerity,—deliberate sin against God. But, spite of all efforts, much will remain in the soul which is not of the highest quality; imperfect notions, crude sentiments, and bad taste; of much of which men are not aware, and, of course, are not to blame for expressing; but also much of which they are, to a greater or less degree, conscious. Now, those who advocate this form of conduct say this should be expressed, in order that the world may know exactly what they are; otherwise, they are pretending to be what they are not.

This opinion I believe to be false. It is not sincerity to deliberately or consciously express the lower part of our nature and life. It is true, God has made it necessary that we should pass through imperfection to perfection. There must be a time of unformed opinions and unhealthy feelings; and just at that time, unfortunately, we are tormented with a fierce rage for utterance, and an almost uncontrollable longing for sympathy; but, certainly, this is not, to any great extent, the time for indiscriminate expression; especially if our doubts, troubles and temptations are such as we rise above and are ashamed of in our better moments. Such things are simply to be kept down, and, if they cannot be entirely banished from the mind, borne in silence, as a trial of our faith or an affliction sent from God.

For the expression of them gives no permanent relief,

but increases the mischief in ourselves, or disturbs and tempts our friend. Let this never be forgotten: the utterance of things from the nobler part of our nature, our honest convictions, pure feelings and best hopes, is always inspiring and strengthening to ourselves and others. But the utterance of the lower nature, our doubts, our restless or impure feelings, and our despondency, is often injurious to speaker and hearer. I know there may be exceptions to this rule. There may be times when we have come to a stand in life, and must tell our doubt and sorrow and temptation; but then let it be told to a nature *above* ours, one who will see through our heart, and will joyfully lead us up to himself; let it not be thrown as a burden on shoulders more bent than ours, or gossipped about at tea-tables, and in the streets. A genuine man will know when such a time has come. But the general rule holds, that we are strengthened only by the voluntary expression of our strength, and weakened by the utterance of our weakness. There is a sort of cowardice in often yielding to our desire to impart everything of this kind. We get to thinking that others can do for us what we can only do for ourselves. We crave sympathy so much that we even half invent trouble, to gain it. And, as a retribution, our own will falls, our work is left undone, we are constantly running away from this battle-field of the soul, where victory may be won, and spend life in imploring other people to wipe the tears from our eyes.

But this is not the worst of it. While we have these crude opinions, and restless and bad feelings in our own minds, they are under our own control; but let one of them go out, and it passes beyond our control, and, like the mist locked in the casket in the Arabian tale, at the opening of the lid, streams up, till it obscures the heavens, and then condenses into the form of a threatening geni. Every crude thought and bad feeling uttered is a new devil let loose upon the world. It comes back and plagues and tempts us; it goes to our friend, and plagues and tempts him; it is free to plague and tempt every man and woman upon earth, until the judgment-day. Oh! there is a terrible abyss between error and sin in the heart of man, and error and sin expressed and acted out into the world; yet how easily is it bridged and crossed; and then we see too late that we have come out of our Eden, and begun our life wandering through the desert!

So should we forbear to give expression to the lower part of our nature, for our own sakes, and in compassion to others. "But how will people know me, if I do not tell them all I think and feel?" you ask. Do not let that disturb you, my friend. Live up to the *best* you can think and feel, and then there will be enough known of your imperfections. God takes care that men shall know as much as they ought of you. It is wisely ordained that no one can know exactly what you are. No one could bear such knowledge. Only to the pure eyes of the Deity can be safely laid open all your weakness and

impurity. And if you try to confide all to men, your words will not serve you, and, an hour after, you will complain of having belied yourself. You cannot tell a friend what you are, if you try; but live as nobly as you can, and enough of the grace and heroism and patience and sadness and weakness of your life will unconsciously reveal itself,—as much as the world can safely be trusted with. Only do you *live*. Your reputation may be left in the hands of your Maker.

Do not infer from this that I approve a cold, reserved, calculating virtue. I do, indeed, enjoin an awful reserve, and a constant watchfulness in the expression of things unworthy to be uttered. But when a noble thought kindles the intellect, when a high and generous impulse raises the soul, when a picture from the infinite loveliness charms the inner eye,—then it is a joy, a divine privilege, to speak and act. Then words have souls, and the lines of a letter talk, and weep, and pray, and cheer, and console, and a strange charm steals into the voice, and the eye flashes love and power into another's heart, and the least act becomes significant, and the whole man is swayed by the stirring of his great thought, as a forest-tree swings, and tosses, and waves in the north wind. This is the noblest reward of holiness of life, that, as a man becomes great and pure, he can trust his impulses, ceases to doubt in the time of action, and at last rises to the point where love holds conscience embosomed, and spontaneously moves upward to the good Father.

And now, having shown you the evil ways of hypocrisy and weakness, how can I close but by directing you again to look upon the celestial form of sincerity? Do you need my exhortations to persuade you to live this life of inward purity, of action and conversation flowing from all that is great and good within? Shall I tell you, or ask you to tell me, of the joys of that divine existence? Let me not attempt to speak of those delights which we have known often enough to fill us with unrest in all the lower periods of our earthly journey; the joy in loving another, with no reservation of advantage for ourselves; the happiness of finding our tongues loosed, while striving to utter a high thought or a pure feeling; the calm assurance that, now we are living in perfect sincerity, there can be no such thing as failure; that success is inspiration, and disappointment a new call to effort, and "to live is Christ and to die is gain." Let me not describe, but say that this and more may be in the experience of every child of God. No one so poor or so humble that sincerity will not open to him the gates of the "kingdom of heaven." No one so great that consecration to the truth shall not reveal to him a new greatness, in which, through humility and worship, he rises to love and power. God grant that you, my friends, may now respond to this benediction, with which the apostle, through me, to-day blesses you: "That ye may be sincere, and without offence, till the day of Christ."

XI.

SELF-CONTROL.

“ He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.” —
PROV. 16 : 32.

CERTAINLY the author of the book of Proverbs deserves his title of “ The Wise Man ” for this saying alone. The force of his comparison will be better understood when we remember that, to succeed in war, “ to take a city,” was, in his day, accounted, perhaps, the greatest proof of manliness. He says that such an achievement is below self-control, and thus declares that nothing so becomes a man as to “ rule his own spirit.” There was, doubtless, need enough of such advice in that period of the world ; and so little does human nature change from one age to another, that in the church and civilization of our time we cannot select words more appropriate for instruction than these, written more than two thousand years ago. For a very superficial glance over society is enough to show the deficiencies of people in this virtue of self-government. One of the rarest spectacles is a man who entirely possesses himself. A majority of the community attempt to govern children, transact difficult business, form opinions upon important subjects, even


to rule their fellow-men, without this cardinal element of a true character ; and the great number of parents who cannot keep their own temper ; men and women in active life, who are enslaved by their occupations ; statesmen and politicians, who cannot hold their own sensual and selfish passions in check ; and persons everywhere, whose opinions are only systematized prejudices, is the sad living commentary of to-day on these words, out of one of the oldest books in the world. Let me, then, — since there is so great need of it, — now enforce the obligation of this duty ; showing why it is obligatory, in what respects it applies to every man, and what are some of its best results.

But we are met on the threshold of this discussion by a theory of conduct, which denies the obligation or value of self-control. Most men acknowledge the *duty*, but fail, from various causes, to perform it. Yet there are those, and a class too, whose abilities and good intentions raise them above contempt, who doubt or deny that it is a duty. Few of them have reduced their scepticism to any definite statement, but the greater number are in that state of uncertainty which poisons every good resolution, and keeps the inner life in a perpetual state of vacillation and unrest. But there are those who distinctly say that self-control is not a duty. They maintain that man should act without compulsion from without or within ; that he should follow unhesitatingly the lead of his faculties and propensities ; that these are good in

themselves, and continue so, while undisturbed in their satisfactions. Such persons talk much of sincerity, and suppose it consists in acting out the feeling or impulse of the moment. They say that this way of life is the only one by which man can gain what they call a "harmonious development of his nature;" the only way by which he can fulfil his true destiny.

Now it is very evident that such a course of conduct would be proper only under certain circumstances. This theory of action is only a part of a general theory of life. If man were created entirely free from liability to disease of his faculties and propensities,—if there were no hereditary tendency to immoderate use of any portion of his nature, and if he could always live where circumstances were so well adjusted to his spirit that there should be no hindrance to the free development of every power, no possibility of interference with others, by so doing, and no temptation to excess in any direction, — then it might be proper to live in this spontaneous way. So the adherents of this opinion are obliged to construct a world of their own to secure the possibility of such perfectly free action.

Whether such a world as this could exist without an essential change in the nature of man, — a change that would take away his noblest characteristic, his moral freedom, and give him in return that kind of development which belongs to trees, and stones, and wild beasts, is a serious theme for consideration. It is my opinion,



that the only condition in which a man could be entirely relieved from the duty of self-control, at some period of his career, would be one in which there was no moral obligation whatever, in which sin and holiness would be words without a meaning, and the soul be capable only of a mechanical, fatal development. And I am not prepared to say I would exchange my privilege of becoming an angel, though at the risk of becoming a demon, for an existence in which I should be compelled, by an inexorable fatalism, to be developed into any form, however beautiful or harmonious.

But the discussion of this question is of no practical use to us, because we are not in such a world. No man was ever born in the conditions or surrounded by the circumstances this theory demands. God has seen fit to place us in a different state of existence ; and certainly, in a Christian church, I shall not be blamed for assuming that God knows how to make a world better than any of his modern philosophical critics.

I say, we are not in such a world as this theory of perfectly spontaneous conduct demands. It is a fact that no child is born free from liability to do wrong ; no one born free from some actual disease of body or mind, which offers a temptation to excess in some particular direction. And each child comes into a world full of other persons, created with the same hereditary diseased tendencies, or liabilities, which are temptations to them. And in the midst of such a state of things, with temptation assailing

it at every step, and conflicting human interests all about it, is this child reared to years of discretion. So each human being, on arriving at that period of life when he must live for himself, finds, as a consequence of this previous training and exposure, his own spiritual nature in a state more or less disordered,—the derangement varying in degrees from mental chaos up to what is recognized as manly self-possession. No person will deny that this is, and always has been, the actual condition of mankind. How much of it is the unavoidable accompaniment of our moral freedom, how much is chargeable directly on our own and our progenitor's sin, how much is providential and disciplinary, is a worthy subject of investigation for people who have the leisure. But this one fact now stares in the face of every person living, that he is, in some respects, what he ought not to be; that certain faculties or propensities in his nature have got an unhealthy growth. In such a condition, to act out freely every desire, is morally impossible; for should every man do this, the world would become Hell before sunset any day. There is only one alternative to this, self-control. Every man must take himself in hand,—must begin deliberately, systematically, and patiently to “rule his own spirit.” There is a place in life for spontaneous action, as we shall by-and-by perceive, but it is not at this period of the soul's progress. Now the one solemn, imperative duty is, to restore order to the disordered inner world.

No part of our nature is exempt from this necessity of




self-control. The highest faculty, no less than the lowest propensity, may fall into excess which will endanger the soul's best welfare. A brief review of the mind in a few of its most striking aspects will verify this fact beyond cavil.

The appetites must be controlled, or, in their present form of action, they will destroy even the hope of spiritual advancement. It is not necessary to assume that they are evil in themselves, as one-sided religionists often have. They are good, and only good, in their own place, acting in true relation to higher gifts and powers. By their union with the passions they constitute the grand impelling force of the nature, and no man can be very great or good without the kind of power which they contribute. They should all be indulged within proper limits; and the judgment and conscience of each man, after long experience, must decide what these limits are; and any ascetic self-denial in respect to them is a loss of power and a mischievous caricature of spiritualism. But this mean of temperance is very hard to be hit in the present condition of human nature. No man or woman of us is destitute of some hereditary taint of physical constitution, either showing itself in bodily weakness or in a heated and clamorous appetite. And so perverse and unnatural is our physical training, that not one of us escapes some form of intemperance. There is no class of vices more subtle in their manifestations than these. Sensualism will maintain itself in the neighborhood of the highest genius

and refinement, and the most intense spirit of devotion. The philosopher may train his intellect to discern the slightest mental differences, while some wicked indulgence stands waiting to receive him when he becomes weary of thought. The poet may so associate his darling sin with everything beautiful in form and seducing in affection, that he half persuades himself it is a legitimate element in his life. The devout religionist may fall from the summit of his prayers into the lowest depth of sensual debasement. This tendency to excess in the appetites is universal, and no form of excess is more fatal to the true life of the spirit. The *first* thing to be done, in self-culture, is to regulate *them*; unless this is done, labor in every other direction is lost. A man with diseased and ungovernable appetites can be sure of nothing. Intellectual vigor, imaginative power, delicacy and strength of religious convictions, and vigor of will, are all at their mercy; and the hope to accomplish anything in life while they are irresponsible to self-control, is like building a city upon the slope of Vesuvius, with an ocean of lava simmering underneath, ready to boil over and sweep it away in a fiery deluge!

And as we rise into the region of the higher faculties, the necessity of self-control becomes only more evident. The intellect cannot be trusted with its blind desire for knowledge, unrestrained by the other powers. The intellect is essentially sceptical; it doubts, naturally, and demands rigid proof before it will admit anything to its confidence. It also pursues knowledge from the simple



desire to know, not caring for the uses or results of its acquisition and inquiry. How easily can two such tendencies become diseased, and convert a man into a mere doubting animal, or a cold critical inquirer! Indeed, the whole drift of what is called "high culture," in modern times, is towards an excess of intellectual activity. Not only things within its sphere of observation, but the highest facts of religion, are tested by its analysis. Physical power, poetical insight, and the deep intuitions of the affections are sacrificed upon the altar of an unsanctified and unsatiated knowledge. I am not disposed to join in the vulgar theological cant against learning and human wisdom. But, while we are bound to keep clear of that, we must not forget that the intellect is only one part of man, and not the highest part; and that knowledge and mental acuteness, however wonderful, are only more terrific instruments of evil when acquired by the loss of those nobler elements which most nearly bind us to God. It therefore is a part of every Christian's duty to keep his intellect in its own place, to strive to feel and live up to all he knows, to resist that mental activity which wears away his health, unsettles his best purposes, and enfeebles his will. It matters not upon what subject a man thinks, — philosophy, politics, business, or religion, — if he thinks to the neglect of the duties of practical life, and the culture of the affections and imagination, he is going wrong, is in the road to a dangerous scepticism. Much of the religious unbelief and social and private uneasiness of the


present time, among the more informed classes, is owing to the want of mental self-control; and he is the wisest man who knows when he has thought enough, and how to apply his knowledge, and to proportion his mental culture to the education of his remaining faculties.

The imagination must be restrained from over-action, or it will upset every rational hope of usefulness or happiness. Without its piercing insight and inspiring idealization, we should be much lower in the scale of being than now; but, when diseased, it can work mischief proportioned to its power to impart good. There is a tendency in every mind to break away from the actual, everyday life, and dwell in an imaginative, dreamy, improbable world. This is hurtful and wrong, and is to be resisted. We may, occasionally, rise above our actual condition, and anticipate, and almost prophecy our future; or we may create a world of the imagination, where truth, love and beauty are more strikingly illustrated than in the community where we live. We are safe in our dreams while they obey the great laws of life appointed by God. But when we indulge our laziness, postpone our repentance, and excuse our deficiencies, by living in an unreal world of fancies and shadows, we are giving ourselves over to sorrow and weakness. For this world, bad as it is, hard as it is to be lived in, and disgusting as it may be to over-refined tastes, is yet *our* world; these men and women, whether in chains and rags, or in purple and fine linen, in degradation and dishonor, or in virtue and honor,

are *our* brethren and sisters; and these duties, whether in the church, or the field, or the kitchen, are *our* work. And though we may shut our eyes, and try to live in the tasteful, pleasant, and easy limbo of our own folly, yet the time must come when we shall be obliged to face the actual. We were made to live here, and any fancy which diverts us from that destiny is pernicious and absurd. So it becomes us to see that the power which makes us capable of such grand enjoyment and aspiration does not become our master, and destroy every noble result of life.

And even in that part of ourselves which is nearest God, our affections, we need self-control. It is true that the affections are the noblest part of us, and in a pure and healthy state are the natural lawgivers of our life. But it is because they are so rarely found in a healthy condition that they need the guidance of reason. How much of our social affection is tainted by a mixture of selfishness, weakness, or passion. True, these excesses are often so attractive, that they are confounded with affection itself; yet are they none the less dangerous. We may love our parents in a slavish spirit of obedience; we may love our children to the verge of destructive indulgence; we may love our friends with a dotting fondness that confirms them in their errors, and robs them of their own peculiar character and energy; we may mistake a sentimental philanthropy for that wise and constant benevolence due to all men. We need self-control to keep

our affection for man wise, clear, discriminating and far-seeing; for although there is no danger that we love our fellow-beings too much, it is possible that we love them blindly, and in many ways that enfeeble them and ourselves. And when we approach the divine affections which belong to God, and that conscience which is a law to the soul, we find the same tendency to immoderate activity, and the same necessity for watchfulness. For, if the raptures of devotion are not joined to a clear head and experience in the practical details of duty, they may lead the mind away into the most fearful conditions of fanaticism and insanity. We cannot safely love God without loving all he has made, and obeying all his laws. And who does not know that an ignorant and hot-headed partisanship may enlist a bewitched conscience as the most effective agent in its rash and destructive designs? The conscience, in its healthy, instructed state, is God's voice in the soul, and woe to him who does not heed it. But woe to him, also, who does not know the conditions of its healthy action, who mistakes for its sacred dictates the blindness of affectional impulse, or the zeal of sectarian fury. Even the conscience must be watched until every power of the mind has been brought to bear upon the question of duty, till every fact has been considered and compared, and arranged, till every prejudice has been expelled, and every disturbing influence, whether from within or without, put away. Then, when self-control holds in its firm hand the balance of conscience, the



rising or falling scale is decisive. But how few of us have not so disarranged our moral faculties by sin that even our best guide is in danger of misleading us ! Our remedy for this is not to pin our faith upon any other man, but gradually to regain that power over ourselves which will ensure us a true report from this oracle of life.

Thus are we compelled to guard ourselves in every direction,—to curb the excess of our appetites, our intellect, our imagination and affections, even to watch, lest some stain of earthly dust fall upon the clear mirror of conscience. Our true life comes from such a balancing of all our faculties, a well-proportioned activity which bears along the whole soul. With a healthy conscience and affections at the head, a pure imagination and a well-trained intellect to do their bidding, a body of temperate appetites, and a will which does not falter or storm out into wilfulness, we are safe. And when a man has thus gained the victory over himself, his great reward is, that it becomes every day more possible for him to act spontaneously and live out all his desires. For, once taught their places, these faculties the less often fly over into intemperance. The appetites, by long discipline, learn to delight in moderation ; the intellect loses that perverse activity which will give the whole universe and the soul's highest good as the price of its satisfaction ; the imagination goes before the spirit, far enough off to allure, and near enough to inspire ; the affections, tempered with

wisdom, crave only the real good of their object; and heaven and earth meet and are reconciled in the religious heart. Then the man may perchance forget that he was once obliged to go through this weary discipline which brought him where he now is; for every power hastens after its proper satisfaction, and, released from the bondage of sin, he rejoices in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

But, my brethren, before we reach that blessed state, we have many a hard day to fight through. Only those who have come into the possession of themselves can live in the full sunshine of God's love. The question now with us is, who shall be our master? For if we do not rule ourselves, some man, or prejudice, or appetite, or fancy, or fanaticism will rule us. We, who are so jealous of our personal rights, are we free from the thralldom of ignorance and sin? We, who are so desirous to make our nation the pattern of self-government, do we, its citizens, belong to ourselves? Ask yourselves these questions, and will not your conscience tell you that you yet need self-control, that there are yet wide regions in this inner world to be conquered? There is the true field for your activity; for though you may have overcome the whole earth, if you are not monarch there, you have gained nothing; and if you do sit upon your own spirit's throne, you are subject only to Him before whom all things do reverence.

XII.

RETRIBUTIVE LOVE.

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” — *MAT.*
6: 21.

THESE words are from the sermon on the mount. The great Teacher, after exhorting his hearers to “lay up treasure in heaven,” instead of “upon earth,” says: — “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also;” or, as we might vary the expression, “You will be compelled to love earthly or heavenly things according as you have placed your thoughts upon one or the other.” This passage is full of instruction, and I will now endeavor to state, illustrate, and apply the truth it contains. The truth is, that the quality of our love depends upon our own character. If we “lay up treasure in heaven,” live pure, useful, Christian lives, our hearts will be where our treasure is; we shall love God, and good men, and the noblest things. If we “lay up treasure upon earth” alone, live only for selfish and worldly purposes, our hearts will also be with our treasure; we shall love things and men unworthy our affection, and become incapable of appreciating or enjoying what is better than ourselves. I

wish, after a more complete statement and illustration of this fact, to apply it to the case of him who "lays up treasure upon earth." I would show that a bad man is punished by being compelled to love what is low and vile; that his own conduct destroys his capacity for elevated habits of feeling or thought, and makes the very affections, which might have been his greatest blessing, his most fearful curse.

To understand the reason of this, we must remember that the human soul cannot live without some kind of love. Every man has natural affections. God intended that these should be directed to Himself and humanity, attract the mind to the most worthy objects of thought, and keep the will fixed upon the highest course of action. But, even if this does not happen, the need to love still remains, and these affections cluster about other and unworthy objects and persons. Therefore, wicked men and wicked habits of life are loved with an attachment as perilous as unnatural. A man cannot exist without loving something with his whole heart and mind. There is no such monster as a human being without affections, great affections. Love is life; the capability to love is the capability to live; the depth and purity of love is a sure test of true greatness of being. Man cannot banish this need from his soul. He may become an angel or a demon, but he must then love like an angel or a demon. This one desire sways all characters, in all circumstances or moral conditions. It is a shallow philosophy which teaches that

selfishness is the ruling passion of man. The great desire of each soul is to love and be loved, to give itself away and receive again the life of another. The selfish man differs from others only in the quality and objects of his affection. He bestows himself upon things which he thinks will yield him the most speedy and a full return. His selfishness is only a diseased form of love. He cannot work in faith, like good men, but his craving desire for satisfaction makes him hug every possession close to his heart, and appropriate all good and beautiful things to himself. He has not forgotten to love, but he loves falsely. A profound analysis of human nature, in all its varieties, will convince us that this desire is at the bottom of every heart, is the necessity of every spirit. And it is a glorious prerogative; for, because we are, by our constitution, obliged to love, are we like God.

The great difference in men is not, therefore, in the possession, but the quality of their affections. One consecrates his powers to God and humanity, and loves wisely and with a celestial strength and purity; others, in various degrees, do not give themselves to the true purpose of life, and are punished by loving basely. Then, among those who are true, there is a great variety in the expression and objects of their affection. Probably there are not two souls in existence who love precisely the same things in the same degree. Each spirit selects its company out of the whole universe, and creates a heaven of its own liking. The objects of human affection are almost infinite in

variety; so the quality of love is the surest test of difference between men.

Now, the question arises, "How far can we control our affections?" We have seen that love is a necessity of our nature, and its quality a test of our character. Have we the power to determine that quality? Can we say whether we will love God, and good men, and lovely objects, or do our affections bear us away from our reason, and force us to love what they will?

There is an opinion, which has become a part of the popular philosophy, that a man cannot control his sentiments. It is supposed that the affections are wayward, unmanageable, and irresponsible, forcing us to go with them, or, at least, rebelliously contending against the reason. How often is it said, "I cannot help loving this person, or this book, or this mode of life." Indeed, men commonly obey their affections as if they were a destiny.

This popular opinion contains just half the truth, and is practically false because it omits the other half. It is true, in one sense, that we cannot control our love. Most men can control the expression of their affections, but no human being can say, at any given point of time, "Now I will love this person; now I will love God, and holy thoughts, and a good life." At each moment of our existence we are surrounded by a company of persons and objects which we must love, and we have not the power at once to change our feelings. So, in this respect, the popular notion is true. We are obliged to love the

present objects of our desire by a law of the human mind, and we cannot violently change the current of our affections.

But the real question lies behind this: "How came we to love these persons and objects? Had we anything to do with producing that condition of mind and heart by which we are compelled, for the time, to love in a particular direction?" The answer to this will expose the fallacy of the popular opinion.

Probably our natural structure of mind and temperament, and the changes produced upon us by causes out of our control, have a great influence in determining the objects of our affections. These things help to form our taste, and decide, in considerable degree, what peculiar modifications of the good or beautiful shall attract us. There is an almost infinite number of things and persons in the universe worthy to be loved; and the variety of constitution in souls enables each spirit to satisfy its desire without interfering with others. The heaven of each good man is, in some respects, different from that of every other; therefore, as far as choice in excellent things is concerned, much depends upon causes out of ourselves. We cannot radically change our nature, or rearrange the faculties of our being. We must accept ourselves for better or worse; and, as far as love depends upon what God has made us, accept our loves with gratitude and without envy, content to play even an inferior part in His creation, if we may promote His glory.

But no man is obliged by his constitution, or temperament, or circumstances not under his control, to love what is actually evil and unlovely. True, one may be born with diseased propensities, and may have been exposed to great corrupting influences during youth, which determine for a time the quality of his affections. But such a person always has a consciousness of his low state, and a desire for something higher, strong enough to lead him into a better condition, if he will follow it; and this possibility of becoming better determines the whole question in its moral aspect. We have the power to follow our best ideal of holiness, and, by thus doing, of increasing our capacity to love what is excellent and beautiful, as distinguished from what is ugly and vile.

It is not, then, a matter of fate or chance what shall be the quality of our affection. The fact that we love God and good things depends upon our own character. If we follow the truth, devote ourselves to righteousness, cast off temptations to selfish and sinful living, we shall become good, and cannot help loving what is good and beautiful. If we avoid the truth, lose our manhood in a wicked course of life, and become the slaves of our own low impulses, we must love what is low and like ourselves. I do not say that even then we may not admire holiness, and confess its superiority; but our great love will be "where our treasure is." The moral quality of our affections thus being dependent upon our character, we have just as much control over it as we have over our character.

Nobody doubts that he can make himself good or bad, in the same sense that he can do anything. We build up our characters by our daily thought, speech and conduct, and insensibly mould them to the shape they assume; therefore we create our own loves in the same way, since we love according to what we are. The mistake of the popular opinion is in supposing that because we cannot instantly change the current of our affections, we have no power over them. But the process must be gradual, and depends upon a previous change in the character; yet, though slow and imperceptible, it is certain. We determine the moral quality of our love by everything we think, say, or do,—by the whole course of our voluntary existence. We can “lay up treasure” where we will, and “where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.”

Having now attempted to show that we have power over our affections, let me explain and illustrate the process by which a man degrades himself, so that his love at last becomes his most fearful retribution.

It is not strange that people should think they have little power to direct their affections. The process by which this is accomplished is so gradual and indirect that few are conscious of it. The character becomes degraded imperceptibly, even while the outward appearance of decency is preserved. Evil thoughts are admitted to the mind, and retained, without the intention of acting in accordance with them. Ambitious purposes are revolved and brooded over till the soul is inflamed with the lust for

power. The desire for great possessions, by long toleration, gets firmly established, and insensibly colors the atmosphere through which every object is viewed. Revenge, contempt, hatred, pride, are secretly cherished, half as an occupation for the indolent fancy, and seldom with any definite purpose. Sensual and corrupt feelings get a lodgement in the heart, distract the intellect, pollute the imagination, and undermine the will, while the person hardly knows his danger. So with a thousand less tangible thoughts and sentiments that float through the mind. Day after day a new crowd of these foolish, suspicious, or wicked guests is entertained, and no harm is apprehended while the outward life is yet firm. But each of these secret mental indulgences in forbidden things makes its mark upon the character, just as every violation of the laws of health can be traced, by an acute observer, in the face. Little by little the tone of the mind is changed; the intellect goes more lazily to its task-work, and stops oftener this side of truth; the imagination dallies with pictures of impurity, and degrades the highest objects by gross associations; the affections become more restless, passionate, and exacting, and do not so often linger about what is worthiest. — Every person has two classes of people and things towards which his heart tends. The one his reason and his best feelings assure him is deserving his affections. He feels elevated by his regard for it, and association with it keeps him hopeful, resolute, and faithful. The other class he loves with a lower passion;

thoughts of it unsettle his mind, make him despondent, uncertain, reckless, and lead him away from his duty. The question, which class of objects shall finally engross his affections, is decided by what he has made his own character. The person who pursues the course I have been describing, at last becomes incapable of living in the region of the noblest objects of his admiration. He may still acknowledge his obligation,—may, at times, feel an intense desire to be worthy of elevated attachments; but his affections have become too sensual to be appeased with pure satisfactions. He is below his admiration; and, in spite of his better reason, and occasional efforts to lift himself out of his low state, he is compelled to love and follow persons and things which in his very soul he may abhor. And this slavery to wicked affections is an awful retribution, perhaps the worst that can come upon the sinful spirit.

A young man may in this way begin a downward course of conduct, which, at the end of a series of years, will leave his soul captive in the hands of the lowest affections. Let him employ his leisure hours in dissipation, or in frivolous conversation, or more frivolous reading; let him forget the reverence for honor and perfect honesty with which he begun manhood, and gradually go over to the practice of those half dishonest tricks by which a man may kill his conscience and fill his purse; let him give free admission to every impure thought that comes to him, remember and lay up for future use every vulgar

and obscene jest and turn of expression that he may chance to hear, and permit his imagination and passions to go off into forbidden regions, and drown his whole being in the intoxicating desire for wicked pleasure; let him fix his eye upon some post of honor in the gift of the people, and determine at all hazards to gain it. He may in this way, without openly defying or outraging public sentiment, in a few years produce a total change in his own character, and, while yet living in respectable society, really love best the lowest persons and things. Such a person might ask me, "What have I lost by indulgence in these habits of thought and life? Am I not still honored and trusted by the community? Why, then, talk of retribution, when I am better off than your saint yonder, in all worldly respects?"—I would answer: "My friend, you have lost everything. Your happiness and real success in life do not depend upon the money in your pocket, the house you live in, your distinguished friends, or the offices you may fill, but upon your own power to love the best things. Once you could enjoy the company and conversation of noble, truthful, sincere men; now you seek the society of the mean and insincere, who will not reproach you for your faults, and will help you execute your low projects. Once you felt proud of your occupation, and could look the world in the face, and say you loved honesty; now you are able to derive a contemptible pleasure from overreaching your neighbor. Once you felt independent, and loved to think, and speak, and act

from your best impulses, and did not care for ambitious distinctions; now you are crazed to get to some post of honor, and that love for popularity makes you a coward and a slave to the people whom you at once court, deceive, and despise. Once you loved the society of pure and high-minded women; now the best among the sex appear tiresome or insipid, and you enjoy intercourse with the gossiping and frivolous, or those who will best gratify your depraved taste. 'What have I lost?' do you ask? Is it no loss, then, to cease loving the best and most beautiful things in life? No loss to have your affections gravitate irresistibly towards sinful and unlovely objects? Once you could love like an angel, now you love no longer thus. Methinks this is loss enough for one soul! Oh, here, my friend, is your retribution! You have degraded yourself, till gradually you have become incapable of holy and true affections, and are now given up to the wild, passionate, restless feelings which make a bad man's soul like an ocean tossed by storms, to which no calm day ever comes. Your wicked loves are the evil spirits that inflict the punishment due to your transgression."

And, in like manner, a girl may destroy the beauty and strength of her character, till she is compelled to live in the same region of life. She may neglect mental culture, and regard common labor as somewhat unladylike. She may read only books full of sentimental and unnatural delineations of life. She may love excitement and pleasure better than her home, and be more studious to

gain the compliments of strangers than preserve the attachment of friends. She may overlook, in a thousand ways, preparation for the duties of womanhood. And she might ask, "What have I lost by this way of life?" Let me tell you what you have lost. "It is the pride and glory of a woman that she is capable of stronger, purer and more delicate affections than man. And with these greatest of Heaven's gifts you have wantonly trifled, till you are no longer capable even of appreciating the true dignity of womanhood. You love the society of those who, like yourself, are weak and foolish. You are tired by a smart hour's talk from a wise person. You cannot enjoy your home. You are wearied with the society of your father and mother, your brothers and sisters. You love to go abroad, but not in pursuit of refined and elevating things; and would prefer to be the belle of an evening party to a sister of charity. You have lost the power of loving what every true woman loves most; have lost that delicacy of manner, and instinctive purity of spirit, which are the offspring of healthy affections. But your losses have only begun in your girlhood. If you do not live in better style, you will keep sinking in your unsatisfactory life. By-and-by the great want of a woman's soul will come; and when you are called to bestow your affections, and give yourself away in marriage, you will love a man like yourself: for you will have become incapable of attachment to one who might be your true husband, in every worthy sense of that relation. No tyrannical father

or mother may compel you to such a union, but your own feeble mind, and frivolous fancy, and restless and discontented passions, will put your hand in the hand of a man who may give you bread, and shelter, and clothes, but not companionship for your spirit. And then you will become a mother, and will love your children, not with an affection that divines their highest welfare, but with that low fondness which exhausts itself in making them pets, in spoiling them by vanity and luxury, till your own sin blossoms out anew from those plants given you by God to water and tend! Yes, all this you are losing, and will lose, in stooping to a life that necessitates a low state of the affections. You have gone away from the true path of your destiny, and now you must lay down the crown of your womanhood, and live in company with your own loves. Is not this a retribution, that you might have been strong, true and good, capable of such affections as are only possible in the soul of a Christian woman, but are now condemned to lament your own weakness, and weary yourself in the vain attempt to live on the chaff of pleasures and excitements, a stranger to the objects of your soul's deepest yearnings,—to live without a woman's rest in pure affections, a woman's faith in man, a woman's trust in God?"

And you, my friends, who have arrived at an age when you should profit by past experience, let me ask you to look back upon your lives, think of the occupations in which you have engaged, the pleasures you have enjoyed,

the success or failure of your schemes, and the changes you have outlived, and tell me how much of this seems really worth a thought, or worth living for. Will you not confess that the only part of your life which is of any true value, which you would care to recall or preserve, is the love you have felt and received? Is any employment, any success, any pleasure, good, unless, in some way, it calls out and satisfies the highest affections? Is not love our only actual life, and are we not dead when in any other spiritual state? You must confess it. And now let me tell you that whether that love of yours be pure, strong, elevating, and satisfying, depends upon what you are, what you make yourselves. You can so behave that your very affections shall become a curse, your only life a death. But you can so live that they shall be the crown of your manhood, and enough in themselves for your peace.—For, think of the joy a good man has in his loves; of his tenderness for his children, and his delight in seeing them grow up to pure and strong men and women; of all those indescribable pleasures that come to him in his own home; think of his satisfaction in receiving the confidence and esteem of his fellow-men; of being respected by the wise and good;—even his compassion for the bad is more beautiful than the love of a worse man;—think of the strength and peace that he derives from intercourse with high thoughts and good resolutions, and what a great thing it is to love duty, freedom, purity, and all the Christian virtues. And think also that this

man's affections are not confined by time, and space, and persons, but range through the universe, call around him the great souls of the past, overleap the gulf of death, and look upon the faces of those who have been called away, claim a brotherhood with Jesus the Saviour, and, with complete self-surrender, repose upon the omnipotent love of God! He alone it is — this man who can love wisely and well — who deserves your admiration, whose lot you may reasonably desire to share. And you may be like him; for the greatest gift of our Heavenly Father is the power to love; and of all gifts is it the most common. Other blessings come with partial distribution; this alone is universal. And you, the humblest soul, in spite of the lack of opportunity, may so live that by sheer strength of love alone you may create for yourself a heaven more grand and beautiful than a poet's dream; a heaven full of the presence of Him who is God, because He is the Almighty Love. Cease, then, to complain for what you have not, when you have the only reality; and begin now to "lay up treasure where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal;" and, after a life worthily spent, your recompense shall be that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

XIII.

REWARD OF THE WORLDLY AND RIGHTEOUS.

“ Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.” — MATT. 6 : 16.

THESE words were spoken concerning the hypocrites, by Jesus Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount. He warns his disciples against their habit of wearing a sad countenance, and disfiguring their faces, that they might “ appear unto men to fast ;” and says concerning them, “ Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”

What this reward was to be, Jesus did not distinctly inform his hearers, doubtless supposing their own observation and reflection would suggest the result of such hypocrisy. And the same spectacle, not only of hypocrisy, but of all kinds of wickedness, often appears now ; and the Saviour’s words, “ They have their reward,” apply as forcibly to sinners of our day as to those of ancient Judea. And we also are left to infer from our own investigation in what this retribution consists.

It is not always an easy matter to decide upon this point. That a wicked man does, sooner or later, suffer the results of his evil doing, is a fact established by revelation and all human experience ; so well established

that he who walks deliberately into transgression goes in the face of one of the moral certainties of existence. But when we attempt to understand the process of retribution, we are confused by the apparent contradiction of facts, and by their disagreement with certain ideas of punishment in our own minds. Indeed, the main cause of our uncertainty is, that we have fixed upon some way of retribution as the most appropriate to the case we are considering, and think the person escapes unless he suffers in precisely this manner. But nothing can be more foolish than for us to dictate God in this way. The infinite justice is directed by infinite love and wisdom, and is as superior to our justice in certainty, efficiency, and the command of resources, as the heavenly government surpasses any code of earthly legislation. We cannot understand all the modes by which a bad man receives his reward. But this we know, that he who sins steps out of the benevolent order of nature, and arrays against himself everything good and true in the universe. He is punished in his afflictions and in his pleasures, in his successes and his failures, openly and secretly. He cannot escape his retribution by any change of circumstances. As he who lives in an atmosphere impregnated with deadly malaria can by no course of diet or exercise avoid its debilitating influence, but must go to another climate or lose his health, so the sinner must suffer while in his sins, and his only release will come on the day when he forsakes them.

There is one fact in this subject of retribution which staggers many honest minds. It is that the worldly and wicked often seem more prosperous and successful than the religious. The wealth, the learning, the power, and the reputation of the world are by no means in the possession of its best men. Why is this; and how, in such a state of things, can these bad and worldly people be said to "have their reward"? Leaving the general topic of retribution, as too broad for present discussion, let us now examine this particular fact, and endeavor to account for it in a manner consistent with the certainty of divine justice.

To comprehend this truth aright, we must go back to a statement of the law of human activity. This law may be very simply stated and illustrated. It is, that there are certain conditions of success in every kind of labor, and the man who complies with them will succeed, will obtain the legitimate results of the kind of energy he has expended, as Jesus Christ says, "he will have his reward." — There is a path to the acquisition of a fortune. Money does not come to a man by accident in the way of business. If we knew the history of the men who have acquired large wealth, we should see that they succeeded by complying with certain conditions. Rothschild, Girard, Astor, were not more fortunate than others,—they were men of great intellectual power, which they turned exclusively in one direction. They knew how money was to be obtained, and were willing and able to do what was neces-

sary. So they "had their reward;" that is, they gained a vast amount of worldly possessions.

A man may obtain political distinction if he has the ability, and will comply with all the conditions. Of course, it requires the entire devotion of his powers and life; especially, in a republic, he must be a watchful and able man, who can anticipate all the moods of the people, and always keep himself in an agreeable attitude before them. I am not now saying what will become of his soul if he complies with all the conditions of obtaining power; only that, if he does, he "will have his reward," — will get power.

So with the scholar, the artist, the mechanic. These men, if not deficient in the requisite ability, by faithful compliance with the conditions of success, will "have their reward," — the one in knowledge, the others in artistic and mechanical skill. And just so in the concerns of the soul, of religion. He who would be a good man must use the means God has appointed. He cannot become a saint by accident or miracle, but must build up, day by day, a strong and holy character. If he is willing to endure the toil of the religious life, he "will have his reward" in the possession of love, peace and joy, surpassing all earthly gifts.

Now this is what we see in every day's experience; the man who has given himself exclusively to business, understandingly, becoming rich; the partisan politician becoming popular; the studious man becoming a scholar;

the devoted artist and mechanic becoming famous in their profession,—each man gaining “*his* reward.” This is reasonable, and according to the laws of success made by God.

But here it is that we fall into error and lose our confidence in the divine justice. We have formed a theory, according to which the religious man is to receive all these good things—money, power, skill, and worldly success in general—as the reward of *his* life. Thus thinking, we naturally expect to see the bad man defeated in his attempts to gain such possessions; and, if he does succeed, though he may have complied with every necessary condition, we are disappointed, and regard him as enjoying things to which he has no right. A little reflection will convince us of our mistake. The rewards of the religious man are not and cannot be wealth, power, skill, and worldly success. He aims only at the attainment of a pure and lofty Christian character, and pursues that object, to the neglect of everything which interferes with it. His reward is, therefore, what he seeks;—a peaceful, devout, and benevolent heart, and a life pleasing to God and useful to man. This, if faithful, he obtains, and becomes a Christian, and is admitted to the honorable toils, the ennobling sorrows, and the inspiring hopes and joys of the religious life. He has no right to ask more than this. If God chooses to give him, *in addition*, riches, station, reputation, and what the world calls prosperity, he should be grateful, and use these gifts for the

good of himself and his fellow-beings. Yet otherwise he is justly dealt with. And the worldly man has justice done him; he obtains *his* reward. He has sought the good things of this life exclusively, and obtained them; and, instead of being envious at his success, we should wish he might receive all the happiness to be derived from the full enjoyment of such acquisitions.

So God's justice is vindicated in giving to each man his reward. But here it is that the retribution of sin appears, *in the nature of these rewards*. Success alone is not desirable, independently of the quality of the thing acquired. A man is not to be envied because he has obtained what he desires, unless that thing, when obtained, will satisfy him. The only test of the worth of a possession of any kind is its power to give satisfaction to the deepest wants of the soul. It may amuse the possessor, may, for a time, gratify one extravagant desire, may appease some craving mental appetite, may, in ordinary times, appear very desirable and beautiful; but the test is, will it answer to all his needs as a human being, a child of God, a brother of man, a laboring, tempted, sinful, longing spirit in this world, and the heir of an immortal existence hereafter? Will it give him comfort when the world denies it? Can he live alone with it? Can he sit by the death-bed of his friend with it, or look sickness, doubt, and weariness in the face cheerfully by its power? Now, as certainly as a man lives does he have these wants, and, sooner or later, he will become conscious of them.

Therefore, the test of real success in life is not whether he has become as rich as Astor, or the President of the United States, or a great scholar, or artist, but whether he has gained that which will satisfy these ever-present needs of his soul,—wants which cannot be put by, but grow more clamorous by refusal, and increase in magnitude with every new epoch in the immortal life.

Let us, therefore, examine the several rewards of worldly men by this test, and we shall be convinced that they have received their punishment in their reward.

The rich man — he whose grand object in life has been to acquire wealth — has he gained that which will entirely satisfy his soul? I would ask him, Do you find in your money that perfect satisfaction which makes you think there is nothing better in existence? These possessions are good; they give you many opportunities for enjoyment; but, even on this ground, do they not also involve you in a corresponding net of cares and vexations? Then, when you are tempted to do wrong, will your money help you resist? When you are sick, can gold give you health? When death comes to your door, will wealth bribe him to go away? Can a million dollars purchase the love of one human heart? Can it cheat your conscience out of one pang of remorse? Can it enlighten your mind with one new truth? Can it stand to you in place of the mighty love of God, and the hope of immortal life? No; it can do none of these things. Then, your *reward is your retribution*. If you have lived only to get this, your life

has been a failure, since, even in the enjoyment of your acquisitions, all the great enduring wants of your nature remain unsatisfied.

The man who has sought only power, and has obtained it, has he gained this satisfaction for his deepest needs which is the test of real success? If the testimony of every ambitious man may be received, he has not. None of the great conquerors, tyrants, or selfish statesmen of the past ever pretended to be satisfied. They were more uneasy at the summit of their greatness than at any step of the path leading to it, and many of them were overthrown in the insane effort to grasp more of that which only crazed them. If you would find peace, you must look elsewhere than into the soul of an ambitious man; and his reward is only new fuel thrown upon the devouring flame of his godless passion.

And, certainly, no skill of hand or mind can satisfy these wants of human nature. The architect who lives only in his temple, the artist whose thought ranges no higher than creations upon the canvas or in marble, are not men to be envied. The old Greek fable contained a Christian truth, which related that a sculptor wrought a female statue so beautiful that his soul was fired with love for it, and he entreated the gods to give it life, and it was changed to a woman, whom he married. It was love alone which could satisfy his heart. And every artist, or creator with hand or mind, comes at last to the same point, where he would give all his skill for one response of human

affection, or one assurance of the love of God. And knowledge cannot satisfy. Her rewards are doubt, unrest, and the fever of the intellect, unless faith and love hold her in that servitude which is her highest glory. Tried, then, by the only unfailing test, what are these rewards of worldly men? Not one of them, at its best, can satisfy the meanest human soul that was ever created. They have their uses; they are not to be despised as the helps of life, and are to be pursued as means and opportunities; but their use is not to usurp the place of God; and he who can only point to one or all of them as the result of his life has signally failed, and has yet to look for the true satisfaction of his nature; and the most melancholy thing that can be said of him is what Jesus said of the hypocrites, — "*Verily I say unto you he has his reward.*"

Compare with these the rewards of the religious man, and the contrast will show, even more fully, the insufficiency of the former. The Christian has proposed for the aim of life nothing less than a character moulded by love to God and love to man, and the pursuit of riches, power, skill, or worldly success, has been kept in subordination to this grand purpose. And by faithful compliance with the conditions of holiness he has at last obtained *his* reward — the love of truth and the practice of virtue for their own sake. And he has secured a lasting possession, over which earthly accidents have no power, and which will be his through eternity. For in what emergency of doubt can he fail to be enlightened by the wisdom that comes

from on high? And he fights against temptation with God's own strength, and leans on a heavenly aid in his weariness and sorrow. His losses are forgotten in his one great gain; even his dying friends make more real the presence of his Father, and the prospect of his own dissolution is but the more vivid sight of the immortal life. He has secured that which will serve him in every possible strait, and every common experience — love to God, which lifts him out of the distracting cares of this world, and makes him act like one above his work, and not involved in it; love to man, which is the assurance that no duty will be neglected, and no human relation despised. How different our meaning when we say of him, "he hath his reward," from the significance of the same words as applied before! The one speaks of a temporary and partial acquisition, good only as it prepares for something better, and wholly unable to appease the divine need of any soul; the other is the acquirement of that which is in itself the best, and imparts to everything else a double value. The success of the worldly man is a failure, in every high sense; the success of the Christian is the fulfilment of the soul's true destiny.

Thus, my brethren, are the paths opened before you. You understand the conditions of success; you know that money, power, skill, worldly reputation can be secured if you accept the toil and risk of their attainment; you know, also, that if not sought with a supreme desire, they may come, given by Providence; and that unless used in

a religious spirit, they are never blessings, but curses. So, before you give your soul entirely to any of these, know what you do. You will have your reward ; but such a reward as will find you poor, exceeding poor, in what is the true worth of life. But there is one reward, given to them who deserve it by consecration and life-long effort, which is truly the gift of God and the joy of the soul. Secure this, and you will have no reason to envy the possessions of worldly men ; for this is the only true riches ; this is the power of God unto salvation ; this the skill that can shape a holy life ; this the fame which outlasts the world ; this the only success by virtue of which you can say, with Jesus, at the end of your mortal years, " I have finished the work thou hast given me to do ;" and this the reward which shall be your crown of rejoicing in heaven, and your assurance of a glory that will endure as long as the being of God.

XIV.

MANNERS.

"Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another."—Rom. 12: 10.

THERE has never been a time when men did not consider good manners worth the labor of acquiring. The first books of history or poetry in which social life is described contain their authors' opinion of the qualities which constitute the true gentleman and lady. These opinions have varied in different ages and states of society; but, whatever may have been the ideas of men upon the constituents of politeness, there never was a dispute as to the desirableness of the thing itself. The most savage nation has its standard of proper and graceful behavior, no less than the most civilized; probably a savage or barbarous people is more influenced by engaging personal qualities than any other. Each nation of which we have accounts in history has had its own ideal of manners, and respected it whenever it was realized in any individual. In proportion to the progress of mankind in knowledge, virtue, and refinement, the ideal of graceful action has changed; but its value has always remained undisputed. And even a superficial glance over modern

life will prove the importance now attached to politeness. There is no country, pretending to be civilized and christianized, where it is not regarded an object of laudable ambition to be called a true gentleman or lady; indeed, there is a large class in every community whose chief occupation is the cultivation of the external graces; who pretend to constitute the court of judgment in all disputes about the proprieties, and assume to hold the keys of admission to good society. There is a literature of manners, and a code of morals depending upon artificial systems of politeness; and few of us are, or care to be, free from anxiety as to how we shall appear in the eyes of our fellow-men.

This respect for graceful behavior is natural to man. It is one way in which he manifests his love for beauty. Every human soul, after its own fashion, loves what is beautiful; and perhaps the most common method by which this affection is shown is in the instinctive desire to appear agreeable. Therefore Christianity has something to do with manners; for one important element of the Christian character is the appreciation of beauty; and the outward habits of our life cannot be separated from our inward thought and feeling. One office of every church, Heathen, Jewish, or Christian, has been the censorship of public manners; and each has had its standard of individual excellence in this respect. While the various nations of Pagans have appealed to the example of their heroes and deities, and the Jew can point to men like Jonathan

and Solomon, the Christian is forbidden to aim at any lower standard of behavior than that taught by the words and illustrated by the life of Jesus Christ. When we fully understand the character of our Great Instructor, we shall know that he was not only a pattern for us in religious opinion and action, but in his every-day deportment. The New Testament is our guide to holiness, but no less the best guide to good manners. St. Paul had an idea of what a Christian gentleman and lady should be; and the remarks on this subject scattered through his epistles, though partaking occasionally of the notions then prevalent in respect to the relations between man and woman, are, in the main, worthy our attentive perusal. In the passage I have selected for my text he very happily states the Christian doctrine of politeness: "Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another." Whoever will study this sentence, and live up to it, may spare himself the labor of reading manuals of good behavior; for he may qualify himself thereby to move with perfect propriety in any circle of truly refined and cultivated people.

In order to comprehend the superiority of the Christian code of manners, we should first understand what relation outward habits bear to character. When speaking of manners, I mean all modes by which we hold communication with others. Politeness includes conversation, and the conscious or unconscious gestures of the body through which our minds are expressed. And these things are so

intimately related to others, that a correct definition of manners would include or imply our whole visible life, whether in solitude or in society.

Now there is a vital relation between this outward visible life and the character. Indeed, the former is only the expression of the latter. The body, and everything done by its instrumentality, is a correct type of the soul. God has so made us that we must reveal the quality of our spirit. It does not remain with us to say whether we will or will not comply with his purpose. He forces us to do it. So the manners and person are what the soul makes them. This fact may be doubted by superficial observers. Many persons form their estimate of a man's character from a small portion of his manners,—the expression of his face, the style of his conversation, or the ease of his movements; and, being deceived, think these things no real test of the inner life. The mistake is, that their field of observation has not been wide enough. To know a man's character from his outward appearance, we must note every peculiarity; not only his physical organization and temperament, but all his habits of life; must oversee him when he thinks himself alone, in every variety of company, and in different positions. In short, to know him well, we must know all his habits. Of course, we can hardly expect to be so comprehensive in our examination of any person; and even if we were, much would depend upon our own insight and judgment; for our interpretation of his manners would depend upon

our ideas of life. Therefore it is always hazardous to pronounce decisive judgment upon a person from the most careful examination of his outward behavior, since we may either omit or give a wrong meaning to some important class of phenomena. The truest knowledge we have of each other comes by direct intuition. It is the peculiar privilege of love that it unlocks the secrets of the human soul. If I truly love a man or woman, I penetrate at once to their character, and interpret their manners by what I thus know of the spirit. But we must never forget that no being except God knows any person entirely. The best human estimates of character are fallible and incomplete. Only to the Father in heaven does the soul appear as it is, with its present character enclosing what it shall be, its best manifestation but the hint of its infinite capacity. Yet, however difficult it may be to estimate character from manners, there can be no doubt that the outward man is the exact type of the inner. Every act, word, and gesture, is a publication of our most secret life; and the only reason why we are not perfectly known is because men are not competent to interpret the meaning of these signs.

It is a fact full of instruction that our manners are shaped by our character; that such a thing as hypocrisy, in its real sense, is impossible. You cannot, my friends, hide yourselves, however much you choose to do it. God knows you entirely. Other spirits, according to their purity, power, and delicacy of perception, know you, and

the best people understand you best from your actions and appearance. You may think it possible to go on living a low, wicked life, and still preserve the form of goodness; perhaps you may be considered a gentleman or a lady by people like yourself. But let a sincere person encounter you, and everything you say and do will be to him a revelation of your degradation. He will read your character in the tone of your voice, the expression of your face, and the shape and attitudes of your body; in your most trifling remarks, no less than your studied conversation; and by a certain nameless influence which always hangs about a bad man, and forces his vulgarity, baseness, and ignorance to appear evident through the most polished and artificial habits. God has decreed that a wicked soul cannot hide itself, even within its own body, from the disapprobation of holy men and pure spirits. The manners are created by the character, and, to one competent to estimate them, exactly express its quality.

This being true, it follows that the foundation of a genuine code of manners must be laid in human nature. True politeness cannot be taught by artificial rules, or learned by imitation of agreeable habits; but is the spontaneous expression of a pure and benevolent soul. Then, whoever would reform the behavior of men must begin with the character, implanting there the germs of goodness and refinement, and leaving them to spring up, and flower into the natural growth of a beautiful outward life.

Christianity, of all systems of religion, or social theo-

ries, complies with this condition. And its value as a doctrine of manners is tested as well by what it does not as by what it does enjoin. There are natural differences in men, in power of intellect, capacity for affection, and susceptibility to refined impressions. Whether a person shall be distinguished for an original development in any of these directions depends much upon his conformation. To become a gentleman or lady, in the highest sense, requires an artistic appreciation and creative power with which few are gifted. A love for beauty often appears in this way; and the genius which, in a differently organized mind, would have written a poem, painted a picture, or built a temple, may charm us through manners at once significant and graceful. Such differences as these Christianity teaches us to accept as part of the providence of God, and only gives rules to direct in that sphere of action where we have power to effect important results. And this sphere includes the whole common ground of manners and morals. All men and women cannot acquire that politeness which charms by its artistic beauty; but all can obey those spiritual conditions upon which the possession of agreeable manners depends. No person is compelled to be a slave to habits decidedly offensive, for it is impossible that he who lives a true Christian life should fail to interest men by his deportment.

The foundations of good manners, then, are the foundations of good morals. The same traits of character which make us reliable, pure, and benevolent, shape our habits

of life, and impart to them an attractive quality. There can be no politeness where there is no religious culture, for all its elements are the Christian virtues. One important quality in politeness is frankness; and how can a man be open and free in his manners who is selfish at heart? His meanness will shine through any mask he may use to conceal it. Another element of politeness is a desire to prefer the convenience of others to our own; and who can long continue to do this, unless he is "kindly affectioned towards" his fellow-men, regarding them with "brotherly love"? A cringing, obsequious manner to superiors at once declares a man no gentleman; but how are we to assume a self-respect which is not in our souls? If we have the disposition of slaves instead of that "liberty wherewith Christ has made us free," we must have the manners of slaves. Delicacy is a most important part of genuine politeness; but a sensual man, whose thoughts are in a constant state of debauchery, cannot behave with delicacy. If he sits still, and does not open his mouth, the evil thing will look out at every crevice in his body. Arrogance of manner is universally detestable; but the man who, in imagination, has his foot upon the necks of half his fellow-creatures, will hardly respect their rights in conversation or in social intercourse. So we might continue to analyze politeness into its constituent parts, and each of these we should find rooted in some quality of the Christian character, and incapable of growth in any other soil. Indeed, Jesus Christ laid

the foundation of all genuine social intercourse when he said, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*"

Here, then, my friends, is the true way of acquiring good manners. If you really love your fellow-men, and endeavor to treat them with that respect and affection which is due from a Christian to every one of God's children, you will be at no loss for modes of expression. You may be conscious of natural deficiencies in conversational power, presence of mind, or grace of personal appearance; but your desire to please others will help you overcome these deficiencies, as far as your opportunities and nature will permit; and your self-respect will keep you from assuming habits which are unnatural, or complaining that more pleasing gifts are not bestowed upon you. * It is astonishing how natural defects of feature, form, voice, and presence, disappear before the power of a true and loving spirit. Genuine strength and benevolence of mind will make itself known even through the most ordinary person. It tunes the voice to a peculiar sweetness and intonation, inspires the bashful at least with an occasional boldness, imparts significance to common words, and often makes awkwardness and embarrassment appeal more strongly to our hearts than perfect grace and assurance. You may never fear to encounter any person, if your heart is right. Love to God and man will give you confidence to appear before your superiors, and attract those beneath you. It will be your excuse for the neglect of artificial forms, and compel those who meet you to

acknowledge that the only real gentleman is he whose love for mankind shines through his daily walk and conversation.

But when we attempt to live up to this Christian standard of behavior, we come in contact with a code of artificial manners, which pretends to all the propriety, and assumes, under the name of fashion, to exclude non-conformers from what is called good society. It is, therefore, important that we understand the position which a Christian gentleman or lady should assume towards the fashionable world.

We may gain some light upon this question by an examination of the code of manners which thus demands our respect. What is fashion? It is a very complex thing, and it would require more time and skill to analyze it completely than I have now at command. But, in general terms, I can say that fashion is the attempt to realize politeness, without a clear comprehension of its nature and conditions. All persons feel the value and beauty of good manners; though but a small part of mankind know that it is an impossibility to produce them in the absence of the Christian character. Those who do not understand this imagine that politeness can be taught. Certain actions, forms of speech, and habits of dress, are observed to appear graceful and becoming upon particular individuals. Hence it is concluded that the same things will be equally beautiful if assumed by everybody. So this form gets elevated to a social law, and all persons, how-

ever ill adapted for the operation, are required to speak, dress, and behave accordingly. Here is the cardinal error of fashion. It overlooks the distinction between the outward and inward. It is right in thinking that good manners are desirable, right in its admiration of grace and beauty; but wrong in supposing that these forms of speech, dress, and behavior, which are beautiful as the natural expression of individual character, will be so when worn merely as an outside show. Roses, grapes, and cherries are beautiful, growing upon rose-bushes, grape-vines, and cherry-trees. But if we twine wreaths around, and stick branches and clusters of fruit into a dead stump, it will only remain a stump, and the flowers will wither, and the grapes and cherries decay and drop off. And equally absurd would be the taste that would engraft these flowers and fruits into foreign trunks, for the result would not be beautiful, but simply curious and monstrous. If we could imagine a forest of such trees, decked out with garlands, and plucked and grafted fruits, we should have an accurate type of the world of fashion; and the difference between fashionable society and a community of real gentlemen and ladies is the same as between these acres of dead and decorated trunks, and the noble woods of Berkshire. For in this strange world of fashion we are constantly shocked by the disagreement between the outward and inward. A man who needs a great deal of benevolence and honesty to redeem his natural awkwardness, attempts to behave with the grace of Apollo, and makes himself ridiculous.

A narrow, selfish aristocrat tries to let himself down, to become for the time your equal, and you despise him more for the attempt than for what he is. A coarse, impure man covers his unclean body with elegant apparel, and tries to be the friend of pure, delicate women, with about the same result as if a smith, with his sledge, and anvil, and great furnace, should attempt to construct a necklace of gold and diamonds. So, instead of the habits of these persons being a manifestation of their natures, they are, to a great extent, false, dishonest, and positively ungraceful, from their want of significance and adaptation. I am not ignorant of the supposed advantages resulting from such a condition of things. I will allow that, on the whole, a greater outward decency is preserved in society, as it now is, than if we were all obliged to "show our colors;" but what is this decency but the worst sham of the whole, deceiving no man of real sagacity, and deluding those who otherwise might be persuaded to live sincere lives? I am not disposed to rail blindly at popular manners. I think there is more truth in them than many suppose; and I know well enough that a genuine man can, even now, assume his own style of behavior, in spite of them. I understand how difficult it is to treat so complex a subject fairly; and how often, in our contempt for the folly, we overlook the real beauty and worth of many of our customs. But any man who looks at the fashionable world from a Christian point of view must find, in spite of all his charity, abundant cause for disapprobation

and pity, if not for mirth. If any human being deserves compassion, it is the slave of this idol, upon whose altars are offered daily oblations of virtue, beauty, and common sense. To feel oneself chained to a particular style of dress,—becoming or ugly, and to a certain mode of living, however ill it may accord with the taste or income; to be obliged to angle for the good will of people you do not love; to submit to the anxiety, humiliation, and self-contempt of dependence for your position in society on the whim of persons distinguished for nothing great and good,—this is a sorrowful spectacle. If the lives of the martyrs of fashionable life could be accurately written, I doubt not we should find there examples of endurance, patience, and persistence, equal to any records in Fox, or the history of missions. This is the most melancholy thing about fashion,—that the same power of mind, solicitude, and perseverance now expended to make a man a fool, might raise him to an enviable position as a Christian gentleman.

You certainly will not accuse me, in this criticism, of disparaging elegance of manners; or a generous and cultivated style of domestic arrangements. That elegance which is the natural expression of a refined soul is beautiful; and I think those economists who would reduce us to a style of primitive simplicity in living are wide of the truth. Neither do I assert that the present social forms are a tissue of absurdities. They are a mixture of good and evil, perhaps contain more good than evil. And this

is an irresistible argument against that style of manner which, under the name of simplicity and sincerity, gains opportunity to indulge in low tastes and ill-red conversation. This affectation is worse than the other; for if a man must be foolish, he should, out of passion to humanity, go off in some beaten track, and invent a new folly to plague the race. It is not necessary that a religious man or woman should take a position entirely at odds with society, or force his own peculiarities in an offensive manner upon others. There are many social forms which are almost unobjectionable, though not exactly what they should be; and respect for the feelings of others, and common prudence, would teach us to comply with them. But there are those which are positively bad and absurd, to which no Christian gentleman or lady can yield, without a surrender of moral principle and character. A dignified and honest spirit of independence will enable us to reject such forms, and still deserve the respect of persons who value their sense above their popular reputation. It is the last degree of weakness to submit to an abuse of this kind from fear of public scandal. If we are not strong enough to endure a talk from persons whose opinions we do not value, for the sake of true, pure, and beautiful manners, we are not fit to retain a responsible position in society. A man or woman who cannot be laughed at for the sake of a principle in social life will hardly stand the fire of the true enemy of souls in other things. I sometimes hear

good people say they do not wish to make themselves conspicuous by opposing the popular fashions. It is not well to parade our peculiarities unnecessarily; but, if such a principle were logically carried out, I wonder where virtue and truth would be. In any age this world ever saw, a man could neither preserve his truth, purity, or taste, without becoming conspicuous in a degree; and to confess that we care more for the opinion of the inferior part of mankind than for the interests of true social success, is a humiliation, methinks, somewhat greater than the shame of any notoriety which we might encounter in the way of duty. But the issue is not fairly made between conformity and startling singularity. It is possible to assume manners at once agreeable to good taste, free from obtrusiveness, and distinguished by that simplicity and directness which put down scandal, unless it is too shameless to deserve notice. Such a course is probably the best for Christian men and women; compliance with established forms as far as can be without sacrifice of principle, the rejection of those which are objectionable, and the adoption of more fitting ones in their place; all done in a spirit as courteous as it is determined. Thus every follower of Jesus Christ may become, not only an exemplar of virtue, but an instructor in good manners.

It is nothing to the point to plead that this cannot be done. I know, a weak person, whose chief occupation is watching the great weathercock on the temple of fashion, cannot do it. But a true and pure man or woman can,

and will. Every really great and good person, I know, of either sex, does this. And what a relief it is to come out of the society of people caged in artificial forms to theirs, you can testify. Their politeness is not a round of meaningless ceremonies, but the utterance, through word, act, and expression, of a truthful mind, an affectionate heart, and a refined taste. In their company we are not every moment reminded of our ignorance of good society, or anxious to keep out of the way of ridicule. We forget ourselves, and do not know that we have a reputation to sustain; for the best faculties of our nature are called out by the presence of worthy objects, and we are swept on by the stream of entertaining and elevating conversation and conduct, and compelled unconsciously to be as graceful as the rest. In the homes of these people politeness is an invisible atmosphere of kindness, smoothing the rough edges of domestic life, assigning to each his place, and merging the interest and enjoyment of one in the highest pleasure and profit of the whole. To be the master or mistress of such a home is a worthy object of Christian ambition; for there alone is seen the true relation between the heart and the manners; there every generous thought becomes a deed; and a great, pure, and beautiful soul shapes life to its own image, and makes of the household a type of heaven.

XV.

USE OF HUMAN EMPLOYMENTS.

“Not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord.”

—Rom. 12 : 11.

THESE words contain the opinion of the great apostle upon the relation between business and religion. He did not, like some modern preachers, place this world and its necessary employments in constant antagonism to the future. He did not tell the Romans that they must despise their ordinary occupations, hate the present state of existence, and devote their time to the anticipation of a better condition of being. But he exhorts them no less to faithfulness in this life than to preparation for another ; and shows them that Christianity consists in obedience to present duty, as well as in expectation of future happiness. And, in the words quoted for a text to this discourse, he instructs the readers of his epistle in the true nature of service to God. To serve God is not only to be “fervent in spirit,” but also, “not slothful in business.” A true state of feeling towards the Deity, and a faithful performance of our duties to man, are the inseparable elements of a correct definition of Christianity.

Yet, when we remember how plain are the instructions of Jesus and his apostles upon this point, we are surprised that, even now, there is a more general ignorance concerning it than almost any other idea of the new revelation. In the popular theology and the popular mind, this world and the future have been, and still are, placed in contrast. Religion consists, according to this view, in a certain round of spiritual exercises, an alienation from human interests, and an ardent desire to enjoy God's presence in another state of being. Irreligion consists in loving this world, and becoming deeply interested in its employments, and a desire to live as long as may be in it. Perhaps the teachers of the popular theologies might be disposed to protest against such an interpretation of their opinions; but this is the impression their preaching makes upon the common mind. It is the great reproach of the church that, in past time and now, its type of character has been monastic; it has disparaged this world for the advantage of the next, and has nourished the tendency to separate religion from life. For this separation does exist, not more in irreligious than in religious communities. Through the whole modern social structure, and our entire habit of thought, runs the notion that the affairs of this world are not the affairs of another; that the details of public and common life are not included within the sphere of Christian obligation.

This idea produces a different effect upon different classes of minds. A selfish and ambitious man is well

enough suited with this separation of business and piety. If religion is popular, he may attend church, pray, and refresh himself on the Sabbath as devoutly as the best; while, on Monday, he can gather up the threads of his occupation, and weave such a web of life as he will, with the comfortable assurance that next Sabbath will make all right. This state of feeling is seen in its perfection in the Catholic church, where, in consideration of a certain amount of money, or devotional rhetoric, God is supposed to permit the indulgence of his creatures in the most abominable wickedness. But it is capable of very pertinent illustrations even in the best portions of the Protestant church; and I believe the common expression, "Business is business, and religion is religion," does not date back farther than the Reformation. In every community this pernicious doctrine is a direct encouragement to all kinds of commercial, social, and political dishonesty; and even men of distinguished talents are found who pretend to defend it, and treat the opposite opinion with contempt. The best argument against such men, if they are merchants, would be to compel them to trade only with men who think business and religion are separate spheres of life; if statesmen, to be brought to the degradation of receiving their only support from those who think the obligation to human power supreme; if fathers or mothers, to see their children, at the same time, members of the church of Christ, disobedient to themselves, and troublesome and hateful to their neighbors. The present condition of society is the

practical commentary upon this opinion logically and consistently applied.

But there is another class of persons upon whom the result of this doctrine is different. They really desire to be Christians, to love God and man, and make the most of their own powers. And, to these, the time spent in ordinary business seems wasted. They long for more elevating occupations, would love to spend life in reading, in the enjoyment of the beautiful in nature and art, in prayer, or, at least, in action which bears directly upon the highest welfare of man. They rebel against this irksome toil of every-day life, and look anxiously forward to relief from it. They may understand that it is their duty to perform this labor, but not why it is obligatory, or of what use it is in their religious discipline. It is for the benefit of this large class,—much more numerous than is often supposed,—that I now endeavor to explain the relation of the employments of this world to the religious life,—to answer this question, so frequently proposed, “Why must I work at common things all my days?”

And, before I enter fully upon the theme, I would say, that by business, in this discourse, I mean the whole circle of human activity, from that usually regarded as insignificant to the most imposing forms of professional action. And when I say that devotion to such employments is the best religious discipline, I mean, of course, devotion to them in a spirit of perfect honesty and faithfulness. I shall not undertake to defend the position, that commerce,

social duties, and politics, as they are generally transacted, are ennobling in their influence; for I doubt whether the road to heaven does lie exactly parallel with any of the great avenues of American trade, or runs by the Capitol, or through the fashionable resorts of modern life. I mean that the duties of this world can be performed in a manner which will make them the best aids to Christian culture; that they were devised by our Creator expressly for our education in the noblest concerns of the soul.

To understand this fact, we must know distinctly the purpose of life. It should be repeated to us every day, that we are in this world for the sake of spiritual discipline; to train and develop to their utmost capacity the intellectual powers which God has given us; to bring the passions and appetites under the control of the reason and conscience; to strengthen, purify and refine every faculty of the soul, and leave the world prepared to enter, with enlarged capacities and energies, upon the employments of the future. This is the sole object of human life; and whatever act contributes to it is worthy to be done.

The means of spiritual discipline are as numerous as the faculties of the mind, and the circumstances and employments of life. It is a mistake to suppose we can become well educated merely by the help of one class of agencies. We need influences adapted to every part of our nature, and as various as its moods; and God has given us every necessary aid for our work. This body, in which we live, and which we so often abuse and then vilify as the cause

of our transgressions, was given to teach us something important, and our souls could not become great, good, and beautiful in any situation so well as within these fleshly limitations. The material universe around us, so intimately related to our body and spirit, is another great instructor, and time would fail to describe the ways in which we may be assisted by its direct and hidden influences. Human souls are also a necessary help to our progress. By contact with them, our mental and moral faculties are evolved, and their thought and action create the proper atmosphere for sustaining our spiritual existence. Books, which are among the best products of the soul, also instruct us, not exclusively, as many seem to believe, but in proportion to our power to use them rightly. And especially are we taught by action. Action—the putting forth of the soul's energies in direct effort to overcome obstacles, and create new combinations in the realm of matter and spirit—is as necessary to its health as motion to the welfare of the body. Indeed, we may say that all spiritual discipline culminates in action, since thought and feeling which never take form through a decisive effort of the will are of comparatively little value in life. And of action, the modes are almost infinite. A man will be surprised to reflect how many different things he does in one day, if faithful to its demands. And all these things are necessary to be done, not only on their own account, but for the discipline of him who works. No one can say how important our common duties are in respect

to the result upon the materials and persons with which we are engaged. It may be that many things we are obliged to do are unimportant in themselves, but they help to bring out certain powers which otherwise would remain inactive. It is not to be expected that we can always see the precise relation of a duty to our spiritual culture; but the fact that it is a duty is proof that we shall be improved by doing it.

Many persons will acknowledge that life is the school of the spirit, but are troubled that the methods of culture should be such as they are. They understand that study, and benevolent and striking action, constitute an agreeable discipline; but how can this be said of every-day, common duties, or those that are not pleasant? It is no part of my present purpose to vindicate Providence, but to state its method; and there can be no doubt that such is the fact, whether agreeable or not. And not only is it true, but even more is plain to a reflecting man, *that the greatest portion of our spiritual education comes from these very common employments.* Books act a very small part in the growth of a human soul; great occasions for action occur but seldom; but these every-day employments are the largest share of our life, are always about us, almost a part of us, and, unknown to ourselves, teach us more than we are aware. Many persons are educated entirely by them; the greatest men that ever lived have been so trained; and all men become powerful and excellent in proportion to their wisdom and fidelity in their

use. So far from being a hindrance, they are the very aids of our growth, and the worst calamity would be deliverance from them.

But we may better appreciate this view of life by confining our attention to separate departments of ordinary action. I will examine briefly one of our common employments, and test the correctness of my train of remark by the conclusion drawn from it. I will select Commerce, and show you that the merchant may so engage in the duties of his station that he shall find it adequate to the purpose of spiritual culture.

I have selected the mercantile profession as an illustration of this doctrine, because most of us in America are more familiar with its opportunities and temptations than any other. It is also the department of life of all others whose relations to Christianity should be accurately defined. For there is probably no profession which embraces so large a share of the talent of our country, and genius often achieves its most striking results in commerce. No person acquainted with the present constitution of American society will deny that the merchants are the leading class in it, and are responsible to a great degree for the character of legislation, social life, and public morals. Even literature, art, and the pulpit depend for their opportunities of success more upon the disposition of this class than any other. This is an unavoidable condition of things, and a wise teacher of Christianity, instead of railing against commercial ascendancy, will endeavor to show

the relations of commerce to religion, and tell his people how, at the same time, they may be eminent merchants, and advance their higher interests in the education of the spirit for eternity. It is true, a large portion of those who are engaged in this profession, as in every other, do not appreciate its capacities, and make of it simply a means to get the greatest amount of money in the shortest time, hoping that retirement, by-and-by, will give them the opportunity for mental and moral cultivation. But this is a wrong view of the calling, and ends in the degradation of the man who adopts it. Do no one of you, my friends, build your hopes of Christian culture upon such a basis. You who have engaged in this laudable employment — one of the first in dignity in modern civilization — are bound to study its spiritual no less than its material uses, and to make of it a mental and moral discipline, as well as a means of acquiring a livelihood. Certain it is that if you cannot become Christians in your profession, you cannot out of it. If you devote all your energies merely to the accumulation of property through the best part of your life, you will have no desire, when you are old, to be different from what you have been. Let us, then, reflect together, for a while, upon the opportunities for spiritual culture, in its widest sense, which this sphere of activity presents.

And, first, it is the peculiar excellence of your profession that it forces a man to rely upon his own ability. There are situations where the talents of others, or a for-

fortunate position, may sustain an incompetent person, but commerce is hardly one of these. Its operations are in material things which obey fixed natural laws, and only he who knows the law can hope to succeed. A merchant, of all other men, must understand his own capacity. He is forced every day to measure his strength and skill against other able men, and soon finds his place in relation to his competitors. If he would become eminent, he must not rely upon the money or talent of his neighbors, but examine, reason, decide and act for himself. And this is also the first condition of mental culture, that a man should learn to estimate his own power, compare it with that of others, and be forced to depend chiefly upon his own energies for success. So your profession lays the best foundation for the development of your mind. Then, it compels you to cultivate habits of accurate and extensive observation. You must know what you are dealing in, and who you are dealing with; and in proportion to the extent and accuracy of this information will be your success. There is hardly any department of human activity which is not related to yours. Politics, and private, industrial, and social life, are especially near it; and you must study deeply to know all their bearings upon trade; and the wide field of human nature is here laid open before you as nowhere else. Will you complain of lack of opportunity for mental culture, when you live in the midst of such a field for observation? And here your business is a teacher; for education is nothing without the

possession of this quality of accurate and comprehensive investigation. Another process in mental discipline is the cultivation of the reasoning faculty, tracing causes to results, and discerning the relations between things; and what profession makes a more constant demand upon this power than the mercantile? You cannot conduct an extensive and complicated commercial operation without going through trains of reasoning as definite and logical as any in mathematics. Then, the faculty of combination, of reconciling contradictory elements, and making a hundred conflicting influences converge to one grand result,—the very faculty by which a work of art or a great poem is constructed,—is essential to mercantile pursuits; for the merchant must hold before his imagination the thing to be accomplished, while his eye sweeps over the whole field, and detects the bearing of each fact upon his central purpose. There are as many artists in commerce as in the studios; and the admirable arrangements of a mercantile establishment have often impressed me with a sense of beauty very like that derived from a fine poem or picture. Then, practical judgment — the power of estimating things for what they really are — is an essential constituent of a well-disciplined mind; and a merchant cannot go a step without this. He must indulge in no dreams or flights of fancy in his work, for to overrate or underrate the value of one agent will derange all his calculations and bring him to ruin. No man can be great without decision and energy, and these are the main pil-

lars in commercial life. To watch for the very moment, and then strike, is the magic influence by which fortunes are acquired. So I might go on and show you that no profession presents greater opportunities for the cultivation of other elements of mental power than this. And no less admirable are its advantages for moral discipline. What an essential quality in the Christian character is patience; yet who has such opportunity to acquire it as he who is obliged to wait and wait amid the complicated movements of commerce, forced to see his best plans again and again defeated, and often to hold on and make head against a condition of things almost desperate? Jesus Christ tells us that persistence is a prime requisite in the religious character; whoever "putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven;" neither is he fit for a responsible station in mercantile life. And who does not know the value of honesty? It lies at the root of the spiritual life; it is the same as truth; and without truth a man is nothing. So, without truth and perfect honesty, a man cannot be a merchant. He may be a sharper, a knave, a bad rich man, and a great many other bad things, but he does not deserve the name of merchant, and is as far without the pale of true mercantile life as a liar is from the church of Christ. Then, where will you find a nobler opportunity for the cultivation of benevolence, in its widest aspect, from courtesy and kindness of manner up to mercy in forgiving men their dues, and relieving their wants, than here? It is the

peculiar privilege of the merchant that he can see and relieve distress more easily than others ; for he holds the reins of labor, and can often bestow that best of charity, employment, which at once satisfies necessity and encourages industry. And this sphere of life is not destitute of incentives to disinterestedness and piety ; for a wise man soon learns that a narrow selfishness is the worst commercial policy,—that a generous, noble style of trade is, after all, the high-road to lasting eminence. And where are men so taught their dependence upon each other as on the exchange, where the richest man of to-day may to-morrow be at the mercy of him who can raise a few thousands in ready money, and the ill-will of the meanest individual may sometimes be a formidable obstacle to success ? And surely a merchant is often enough reminded, in the midst of his activity and the trophies of his industry, of his own weakness ; for a fire in one night may burn up his wealth, or one storm send his ships to the bottom of the sea, or a day of illness in himself or his family derange the most skilfully contrived plans. Why should he boast himself, when God commands the elements,—the rain and sunshine, and the growth of crops, which form the materials of his trade ?—when he finds himself hemmed in on every side by supernatural agencies, to which his life is simply an adaptation more or less effectual ? Here then, my friends, you see the real character of this profession which you may have supposed to be conversant alone with material things. You find it contains within itself the

means and opportunities for producing the most valuable mental and moral qualities — self-reliance, habits of observation, the reasoning and constructive faculty, practical judgment, decision and energy, patience, persistence, honesty, benevolence, disinterestedness and piety. All these things a true merchant can learn without going out of his counting-room; and tell me, if you will, whether the wit of man ever contrived a better college or school of theology than this? That your calling has great temptations is the natural compensation for its great capabilities. That men do not use it as I have described is no excuse for you to degrade it yet more. It is the place in which God has put you to become as great and good as you are able; and be you anxious, above all things, to improve such an inestimable privilege as the position affords.

In like manner it might be shown that each of the ordinary professions of life is furnished with the means for spiritual discipline. The farmer who fully understands the resources of his calling may gather from his fields a finer crop than his hay and corn — a constant lesson in all things which go to make a true man. The mechanic need not leave his designing and building to find employment for his best faculties of mind and imagination, and his work may become as noble an expression of religious aspiration as the most elegant written or spoken words. The seaman who sails over the ocean and visits foreign lands, with his intellect wide awake and his moral principles sound, will not only freight his ship, but his soul,

with valuable knowledge and a generous regard for human nature. The wife and mother may, in the superintending of her household and education of her children, display as much spiritual energy as would be required to create a reputation for literary excellence or public philanthropy. Indeed, there is no occupation which may not be so engaged in by a serious and thoughtful person that it shall open a sphere for all human activities. Then, there is no profession beneath a man; but there are many men beneath those common professions which within their monotonous and unpromising routine embrace treasures of priceless value to him who has the energy and faith to secure them. Perhaps the majority of mankind cannot be educated by means of what are called the highest influences — reading, and dealing directly with ideas and principles; and these professions are the schools in which, by honest and persevering effort, they may acquire firmness and flexibility of mind, and those moral qualities, which by-and-by will fit them to enter into more direct contact with spiritual things. The real dignity of labor consists not in the fact that a man digs the earth, or builds a house, or in any way overcomes material resistance, but that, by this action, the best powers of the mind and heart are developed, and he is becoming greater and better for what he does.

Therefore, it is a great mistake for us to despise these ordinary labors, and desire what we call more elevated employments. There are certain pursuits which, by com-

mon consent, are regarded more difficult and honorable than others, and better adapted for the training of the higher order of minds. But we should remember that the *results* of these are of precisely the same nature as the common professions. All they can do for a man is to educate his spirit; and unless he is qualified to use the means they afford, he is positively worse off in them than elsewhere. And if the majority of men knew how little the work of such pursuits differs from their own, they would cease to envy the laborers in those difficult fields. The scholar, the poet, the artist, the preacher, and the statesman, are obliged to perform more real drudgery than the farmer and the merchant. This part of their profession is out of sight, but no less a reality. The acquiring of knowledge and skill, the arrangement of ideas, the discouraging toil among confused trains of thought, and the uncertainty which always accompanies purely spiritual effort, is the compensation for the advantages of this sphere of activity. When the man comes along who has the native power to overcome these obstacles, and grasp a hard-earned success at the end of a weary life, he may well try his fortune here; otherwise let him be content to gain the same kind of discipline in a way simpler, and better adapted to his comprehension.

If I have now succeeded in making clear my meaning, you understand that the great use of life is spiritual culture, and that its various professions and duties are a series of schools, in which we are placed to acquire certain qual-

ities essential to the Christian character. God only knows in what department we shall best advance. Our duty is to accept the situation best adapted for us, and use it to the best advantage as long as we live. Then, when we are called away, and enter another field of labor, it will be of little consequence upon what sort of materials we have wrought in this world. The test will not then be whether our hands have tilled the earth, built in wood or stone, pulled the ropes of a ship, written a book, painted a picture, or held the sceptre of a nation; but whether we have gained from these employments that power of mind, purity of taste, and uprightness and force of character, which will enable us to grapple with higher themes and more suitable occupations. Our gold, our merchandise, our lands, our civic honors, our poem, or our temple, we cannot take with us; but we shall take the soul, which has been fashioned by our effort to gain these possessions, and to acquire and create this power and these works. And he who carries to the unknown world the noblest results from this, has lived the best, and had a genuine success in life. Whether that spirit be Shakspeare, Washington, or some faithful tiller of the ground, or sailor upon the great deep, or man of various worldly cares, or woman unknown out of her own well-ordered circle, God only can decide; but this we know, that we can serve Him only by making the most of those opportunities His wisdom has contrived for our growth in the Christian life.

For God's method of education is the best, and we only

go wrong and fall into confusion when we would alter it. When He creates an oak, He does not plant it in a hot-house, and send gardeners to water it, and shut off or let in the light and heat; but an acorn drops into the side of a hill, and by-and-by a green twig shoots up among the rocks; and through drenching, and freezing, and scorching, and blowing, and the sifting of the earth over it, and the "hap-hazard" of vegetable life, it fights its way along, season by season, till in a hundred years it shades the herdsman and his flock, and the wild storm becomes an anthem away up among its branches. Neither does He choose to rear us to manhood upon spiritual dainties, or in the conservatory of any transcendental theory, but gives us a soul, and a will, and a place to grow in the midst of his universe. And by living as He has appointed — now standing with our faces scorched in fires of sorrow, now pacing over flats of monotonous labor, now twisting, and stooping, and clambering through rugged paths, now waiting in the dark for the appearing of one star; by being all, and doing all that He wills, do we grow up into the "perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

XVI.

ANALOGY OF THE YEAR.

“For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”—Rom. 1: 20.

IN these remarkable words the apostle tells us that nature is a revelation of the character of the Deity. “From the creation of the world the invisible things of Him are clearly seen” through the agency of this interpreter between God and man. This truth is so often declared in the Scriptures that one must be an unbeliever in the worst sense to doubt it. Nature, as viewed by inspired men of the olden time, by the Saviour of the world, and by every true Christian soul now, is not an unmeaning catalogue of senseless creatures, but a living organism, in every part vital with the life of its Creator. In the grand expression of the greatest of modern poets, it is “*the garment by which God is seen.*”

But nature is not alone related to the Deity. It has also an intimate and profound sympathetic connection with humanity. While it reveals the being and perfections of

the Creator, it responds to the nature and life of the creature. On one side fading away into infinity, on the other boldly projected into the life of finite existence, it must ever be a medium of communication between the two — the magnetic telegraph of the universe, along which pass and re-pass the eternal thought of God and the answering thought of man.

This relation of nature to the human spirit has always been felt by those who were great and good enough to look through and beneath material appearances. And in every age of the world, the outward universe has been regarded as a type of the universe of rational being. In the grand sweep of natural forces, men have been accustomed to discover a likeness to the more sublime events in human thought and action; in the subtle and beautiful movements of foliage, cloud, and sunlight, a faint interpretation of these mysterious operations of the soul which can only be pictured, never expressed by definite words. The seasons of the year, being the most obvious and strongly marked features of nature, have always been compared to periods in the life of man. The Spring has been likened to his youth; the Summer to his full glowing manhood; Autumn to that period which, richest in useful labors, yet wears the marks of decaying vigor; and Winter to the prostration of active powers,—the cold sleep in which the soul awaits its deliverance from earthly service to heavenly freedom.

There is great beauty and singular appropriateness in

this comparison. But it is not the only one which can be made. Others there are no less natural and striking; for nature is so wide and varied in her life that she gives a symbol for every mental condition, and follows the spirit, recording its achievements on her gigantic page, whose letters are suns, and stars, and forests, and seas, and mountains, and storms, and times, and seasons; so that, do what he will, man can find in the "things that are made" a startling picture of his inmost thought, and deepest life.

I have always loved better to find in the changing seasons an emblem of progress in the religious life of the soul, than of the mere process of animal existence from birth to death. Beginning with the new year; the beauty of the outward world is buried in the grave of Winter. Bare hills and snowy fields, cold waves breaking against ice-covered rocks, short days when the sun loses his power almost as soon as he gains it, changes of frost, and rain, and snow, proclaim a pause, and almost threaten death in the outer world. Yet, we believe that, under an aspect so cheerless, nature is only hiding her smiles; that from this general barrenness a mighty creation of beauty and fruitfulness is destined to leap forth into the sunshine of a new Spring.—So lies the soul of man before its great spiritual energies have been aroused by the voice of God. His life is cold, and barren of great results. He only changes from a dreary calm to a confused mingling of troubled passions. In sorrow and shivering despair he

awaits his Spring. And the same faith that fills my room with pictures of singing birds, and bright streams, and green trees, while sitting at my fireside in Winter, bids me never despair of the life of his soul. For, even while all without looks so unpromising, I believe that within new energies are mustering, knowledge is growing into wisdom, and experience into love, and conscience struggling to throw off the load of sin, and the imagination shaping a noble ideal, and the will slowly maturing for days when God's providences shall fall like thawing rains, and His love stream upon the soul like April suns, and that life, which was so feeble and cheerless, shall become glad and strong, and rejoice in divine allegiance.


And what is Spring but the assurance that such a faith is not vain? In a mysterious way the change begins in nature, and the short days of winter gain at morning and evening, and the sun comes up at every dawn with greater energy, and the air softens, and blades of green grass look out from every warm nook, and before we know that the dreary season has gone, a bright day tells us what nature has been doing while we were asleep. And, when so much has been gained, the Spring comes on by leaps; and storms, and late frosts, and fog, cannot hold her back. She has broken her chains, and, through all these hindrances, rushes forward towards the Summer.

How apt an emblem is this of the change that comes over the spirit, chilled and darkened by sin! While we think it quite dead, it is often rousing and training its

energies in secret, perhaps, even in the practice of unrighteous deeds, acquiring a skill and force which shall, by and by, gain victories in the holier conflicts of the Christian life. At first, a few manifestations of goodness relieve our despair; and then, through reverses, and spells of cloudy weather, and sudden changes, and startling contrasts, the work proceeds. But we are at last brought into some peculiar relation to him who is thus approaching God, and are astonished at the great distance which he has already gained. He may yet be very confused in his conceptions of the heavenly life; but he has begun it; and when a man turns his face away from sin, and *looks towards holiness*, he becomes a different creature. Then he was becoming worse, now he is growing better; and, though it may be as hard for him to break from old associations and habits as for Spring to get loose from the clutch of Winter, yet, by constant endeavor, he will surely do it. And, as often in a stormy Spring there comes a day when the dampness gets out of the air, and the sea puts on a Summer look, and the clouds and fogs move off and leave a clear sky, and the birds sing a victorious strain on every bush and half-leaved tree, so now and then comes a bright day in his life, when he can see his way clear before him, and a peace from God gives him a blessed assurance that other and better things are in store to reward him for his faithfulness in the future.

And these beautiful Spring days are prophetic; for, one by one, signs of elemental conflict disappear, and the

season of warm, bright days approaches,— the Summer, with its prolonged sunshine, its wealth of foliage and flowers, its cool running waters, and shades inviting to repose, its vocal early dawns, and evening twilights fading into nights glorified by the moonlight. This is the year's time of rejoicing. From every field and hill-top we hear a song of triumph for the conflict that is past, of exultation over the glory of the present, and promise for the fruitful time to come. — So does there come to him who has just fought through the first great strife against sin a period of full and generous life, of joy and thanksgiving. Then the soul thinks all danger is past. Its initial service has been bravely rendered. Out of the very grasp of sin it has torn itself, and come up into strength and glowing spiritual manhood. And, as it looks back over its slow and rough journey, as it now sees life, outstretched like a wide landscape, blossoming for harvest, and thinks that, with a little more toil and God's blessing, the reaping and gathering time must come, why should it not be glad? Oh! who that has ever lived as he ought can forget this period of his Christian course — the time when he exulted in a newly gained power, and knew no discouragement to his boundless hopes, and his own path was light before him, and humanity seemed only waiting to hear and follow after the truth! Thank God that He gives a time to every faithful child of His, and so early in the beginning of his Christian career; for then we gather joy and energy to use as we go on. It is the soul's holiday,



when it forgets the dangers that are past, and is kept from a knowledge of the difficulties that are to come.

For this condition of mind is not final, but, like those which have preceded it, only a state of transition. Even as the glory of Summer is subdued to the sober loveliness of Autumn, so does this exultation of the soul give place to a new phase of the spiritual life. We cannot tell how the Summer escapes us; but, ere we think, everything wears a sadder hue,— the dense green of the forests and the meadows fades to a graver color, cool nights temper the fierce heats of mid-day, and an indescribable change creeps over nature. By and by the red leaves of the maple show us that the frost has invaded the foliage, and then it comes on with swift steps, until every wood and shrubby hill-side wears the radiant tokens of his presence. Then we have those calm October days, when the horizon is obscured with a thin haze, and the changed forests, and glowing files of bushes, and variegated grass fields, lie wrought into a bewildering picture by the strange atmospheric charm which enfolds them. The corn and fruit have already been gathered in, and the earth, despoiled of its rich freight, lingers a while, clad in a wondrous beauty, ere it gives up to the approaching dreariness of a new Winter.

Similar to this great change is that which is wrought upon the spirit, as it learns more of life, and begins in earnest to do the work appointed it upon the earth. Pausing on the threshold of its new existence, it may a while

give itself to rejoicing and hope, but not long. Soon as it begins to act upon its materials, and out of them tries to build a spiritual temple, a crowd of difficulties, obstacles, discouragements and failures, harass it at every point, until its extravagant hope is subdued to a patient faith, and its joy to a calm thoughtfulness, and its feverish activity to rational, persistent labor in the cause of truth.

It is not in the nature of man to remain his whole life in that state of youthful enthusiasm with which he began his Christian course. There are too many things to make him thoughtful; well, if they do not make him sad and despondent. He who never thinks or feels deeply may, perhaps, preserve his early freshness, but not he who accepts the inevitable experience of our mortal state in any becoming manner. For, as he gets on, he finds men more obstinate in their sins than he supposed; and wicked customs, which he believed could be plucked up like wayside weeds, are found too deeply rooted to yield to his strength; and he is doomed to work year after year with no satisfying return for his labor, and sometimes he doubts whether his resistance to evil is not altogether vain, and it would not be better that he should go over and help the multitude enjoy its idols; and, sooner or later, the deep problem of suffering is offered for his solution, and he discovers that every spirit is bearing its own black cross. Strange, indeed, if, with all this to pull him down, he should not lose something of the fire of his early hopes, and become more cautious and thoughtful. He may,

indeed, try to conceal this change by an assumed briskness of manner, or a reckless, defiant posture towards sorrow; or he may run away from thought and real life into artificial existence. In either case he destroys his own soul, and deceives no one except himself. For our spiritual condition is known by every act of our life, and the early buoyancy of boundless hope and conscious power can never be imitated so as to blind the eyes of a true man.

And why should we desire to conceal or avoid such a condition of the soul? It is a necessary period of our growth in the heavenly life. We must pass under this shadow of mortal toil and suffering before we are fit to encounter the more dazzling beams of the sun that lights up the world beyond the grave. All this work, this discouragement, this grief is a part of our lot. Why not face it at once like men, and accept what it brings? It does bring treasures, compared with which our former state of happiness seems a very childish way of life. It brings knowledge. In this rough dealing with actual things, our fancies are dissipated, and we learn to estimate correctly our own power, and where to direct our energies. It brings insight. These convulsions of the soul, like the tearing apart of hills by earthquakes, open shafts to mines of gold and diamonds, and loosen a thousand hidden springs that flow in refreshing streams over a thirsty landscape. It gives foresight. Through disappointment and failure we learn to rightly proportion our work, to anticipate correctly, and are saved from a life of

wasted labor. And, better than knowledge, and insight, and foresight, or anything else learned in this severe instruction, is faith. For not until our own strength has again and again been proved to be weakness, and our own extravagant expectations have melted into "thin air," and we have been balked, and troubled at every turn, can we know how good it is to look above, and while we abate nothing of our faithfulness, in perfect trust, leave events and future times safe in the mighty love of God.

So has the discipline of life accomplished its work when it has taught us faith. Then we can live without this wild joy of our youth. Our wise and constant toil will give us calm days and quiet nights; our confidence in man's capacity for holiness will not fail when we think of the Providence that enfolds him; and our feverish desire for happiness will be subdued to a firm confidence that if *we are always true to God, He will be true to us*. Our lives may no longer dazzle the multitude with a shower of brilliant theories, and fine words, and freakish actions; but we shall move among men encompassed with an atmosphere of mild, chastened light. They may not worship us, but they will gain our power, and be inspired by our heroism, and subdued by our resignation, and awed by our purity, and steadied by our faith. And a higher, holier beauty of character shall then be ours than that of youth; even as the pensive loveliness of an October day brings us nearer to God than the glory of a morning in June. The one is the glory of hope and con-

fidence, that may be overturned; the other the beauty of a thoughtful faith, which reposes fast upon foundations which can never be moved.

So does the year go round, following the changes in the soul of man, and weaving into living pictures the deepest experiences of his religious life. Nature is a versatile teacher, accommodating herself to every mood of our minds; — yet variable only on the side towards us; for she is yet an image of the eternity of God. Her seasons flit on swift wing; her suns and stars rise and set every day; her waves flow, and break, and are lost; but, through all the changing splendor of the months, run the laws which bind into years and centuries a thousand varied days; and though systems wander through space, the great universe has reposed in harmony since the last dawn in the week of creation; and, though a myriad waves and storms seud over the surface of the ocean, its deep places are clear and calm, and its beatings and writhings are held fast in the rocky arms of its surrounding shores. Everywhere at the centre of nature is steadfast power, a type of its eternal Creator. — And so is our life moved through strange vicissitudes, and it breaks out into wild and unknown ways, and we do not know at our best estate when it is to gain its promised rest; yet is God ever above, and around, and in the faithful soul; and all its failures, and toils, and sorrows, are of His appointment, all enfolded in His infinite and reconciling love.

XVII.

COMPLAINT.

“ Wherefore doth a living man complain ? ” — LAM. 3 : 39.

THE prophet asks this question in reference to a peculiar cause of complaint, the punishment of a man's sin ; and, certainly, we could imagine nothing which would justify a spirit of rebellion less than the righteous retribution for transgression. To those for whom the words were spoken, no appeal could have been more forcible ; and yet, separated from this peculiar application, they have a meaning for us as broad and deep as life. For have men ceased, in these latter days, to complain, not only at the punishment of their sins, but the providential difficulties of their lot, their labors, their trials, even at the plan of life itself ? I fear, brethren, that in our souls the spirit of discontent is as often in the uppermost seat as the spirit of contentment, and that our lips, which should utter only thanksgivings, are rarely opened to speak words of gratitude or praise to God. In view of this fact, so notorious that I need not stop to prove its existence, let me, giving to the question of the prophet an application as wide as our whole nature and experience, ask you,

"Wherefore," in any combination of circumstances which life may present, "wherefore," with any show of reason, "doth a living man complain?"

"*A living man.*" Have you ever reflected upon this fact, that you are permitted to be one among created things? Your life, do you know what it is, and of what it renders you capable? If so, methinks the greatness of the gift would stop the mouth of the most determined fault-finder among you. For, consider, a moment, what this simple fact of being alive implies. To live—is it not, at the lowest estimate, to experience many exquisite pleasures of the senses, and much of that happiness which comes from the possession of a body admirably constructed to receive and retain impressions from a universe of useful and beautiful creatures? Yet more; is it not to possess faculties so much nobler than these animal propensities, that, in comparison, we often look upon the latter with contempt, and esteem a moment of intellectual and moral life above days of sensuous indulgence? To live—it is to receive the gift of reason, to which all knowledge and all mysteries lie open; of memory, which arrests the fleeting incidents of the past, and weaves them into a series of glowing pictures, whose colors only become fixed and mellowed by age; of hope, eternally beckoning us away from the failures of the present; of human love, flowing in upon us from the day of our birth till the day of our death, and striving to flow out from us in return, and impart a greater joy than it has received; of divine love,

which, breaking over the lines of our individuality, runs in perfect confidence to lose itself in the bosom of God, that it may come back and make us greater men, that we have, for a time, forgotten the existence of every being excepting the Father. This it is to live—to know, to remember, to hope, to love, to worship. All this can you do, because you are a “living man.”

And when we contemplate the results possible from the exercise of these faculties upon the world of matter and mind, a conception of life yet grander rises before us. For all earthly things that we are most accustomed to reverence are the product of man’s creative mind. Commerce, governments, social life, art, literature, and the outward form of religion,—these follow as by a chain of necessity, when life is given. And even these, imposing as they may be, pass into insignificance before the possibilities of any truly awakened soul. The spirit of man is always in advance of its trophies, and thinks the glory acquired but a faint type of the honor to come. For beyond the shadowy outlines of our science lies an unexplored universe; and under the depths of all philosophies opens deep below deep of wisdom; and higher than the song of any poet can the imagination rise in its daring flight; and “no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive,” the increasing joy and peace in store for the soul baptized into a faith that evermore draws nearer to God.

Such is life in itself,—such are its possibilities. Now.

contrast a condition like this with non-existence. Place beside this fact of life, with its wide and vast relations, the awful negation of being! You, my brother, are among the "living." Is not this enough to fill you with a boundless gratitude? You are living because of the pure goodness of God. Inhabiting a universe fit for the abode of a being as glorious as you may become; endowed with faculties which we dare not call other than divine; knowledge, beauty, and love on every side inviting you to your proper employment; "*Wherefore do*" you, "*a living man, complain?*"

But, passing from this view of life, as a whole, to more particular considerations, let me inquire if there is any portion of existence which, examined in the light of a Christian philosophy, affords a just cause of complaint. Thus can those who are dissatisfied be met upon their own ground; for it is only by separating a part of life from the whole, and regarding it out of its relations with everything else, that even a pretext can be found to countenance a spirit of discontent. Let us, then, briefly look upon that portion of existence which is supposed to excuse the indulgence in complaint,—the evil that is in the world,—for here, if anywhere, must the disciples of the philosophy of discontent intrench themselves.

I shall not attempt to evade this question by a denial of the existence of evil, or by an exaggerated description of the happiness actually enjoyed by men. Nothing is gained for religion by ignoring the sin and sorrow of the

present state of being ; even by representing the life of the Christian as one exempt from trial. Christianity does not authorize us to make such representations in its name ; for Christianity, be it understood once for all, is not a master of ceremonies, offering to the world higher forms of pleasure, and more refined enjoyments, but our stern instructor in that eternal law of duty which may lead us through green meadows or over sharp rocks, and be equally worthy our reverence. No man, of any experience in life, can shut his eyes upon the sin and affliction of humanity. Let the fact, then, be accepted, even in the exaggerated form in which the most obstinate fault-finder would present it.

Of course, I shall not presume to discuss the question of the origin and existence of evil. I leave it to him who, at the end of a life of thought, has been in doubt, to say whether the problem can be solved. I do not know why this dreadful hazard should be permitted to accompany us everywhere, or why our moral nature, which is our highest glory, should, at the same time, be our most perilous gift. But if it be true that the existence of evil is not inconsistent with the facts I have already stated of life, viewed as a whole, I think it forms no reasonable ground of complaint. And nobody, excepting those philosophers whose theories release me from the obligation of argument with them, will pretend that this general picture of life is at all defaced by the existence of sin and sorrow. Is life any the less a gift of God ; or are we

deprived of the power to think, to remember, to hope, to love, and to worship, because evil is among us ; or do, thereby, commerce, and governments, and literature, and social life, and art, become impossible ; or is, therefore, the great universe of matter and thought locked and barred away from the conquering intellect ; or has a cloud obscured the Infinite Beauty ; or has the name of God ceased to be love ? Great, indeed, is the evil in the world, but not great enough to disturb this truth, that life, as a whole, is infinitely preferable to non-existence. True, it comes before us as a comet rushes blazing across the solar system, scaring men by its fiery presence ; but even while its burning train sweeps half the sky, the sun rises and sets, and no planet or satellite is jostled out of its place. So stands the great system of life, too firmly fixed, and too nicely adjusted, to be convulsed by any intruding force. "Wherefore," then, even in view of evil, "doth a living man complain ?"

But let me go beyond this negative argument, and by an appeal to your own consciousness deprive you of every apology for discontent. You complain that sin is in the world. At what point does your accusation lie ? Not in the fact that you are punished for transgression, for you know that sin deserves retribution, but in your liability to sin. "Why am I tempted to do wrong ?" you ask. I do not know ; but I know that this liability to temptation and sin is accompanied by the greatest privilege, that of resisting temptation and becoming virtuous and

holy. You cannot separate the former from the latter, for God has joined them in the constitution of your nature. And now place yourself, in imagination, at this point. Ascend this your mount of temptation, and, on one side, look down the almost insensibly declining way that leads gradually among clouds, and further off into the shadow of death; and, on the other, upon that rising path which runs upward till it is lost in the gleaming country where the sun shines forever out of a cloudless sky; and tell me if you dare complain that upon *you* is placed the choice whither to go? Will not the thought of an issue so momentous arouse a heroism that scorns a murmur? Will you not say that you are preëminently a man, because you stand there, subject only to the necessity of a universal Providence, to a certain point sole disposer of yourself? And can you weakly desire to be released from your temptation to walk downward, when the sole condition of that release would be the loss of your manhood? Or would the sun shine as brightly, or the trees wave as gladly, in those celestial fields, if you were carried there like a sick child, as if you entered them with your shoes covered with dust, and the staff in your hand, and a prayer upon your lips to God who saved you through the perils of the journey, and brought you to repose a moment in the first of your promised lands? Methinks I hear a response from every noble soul, "Let me be tempted, O God; since, through thy might, I can gain deliverance from temptation, and

achieve the glorious rewards of a tried and conquering virtue ! ”

And who among you, brethren, will complain that sorrow is in the world ? Certainly not you who have been greatly tried, and have gone with your burdens to God. I hear murmurs at the afflictions of life, but only from those who have been vexed with petty annoyances, or, in more serious difficulties, have foolishly gone to themselves or to men for comfort. I hear them not from those who have again and again been stricken, and have learned the divine secret of self-renunciation in the darkest hours of life. Full well they know that “when they are weak then are they strong.” For tell me, you who have been near enough to God to know, tell me if your great sorrow has not called you away from a world of unrealities, and opened the doors of a world unknown before ? It has demolished the creation of your own skill, that lay so fair and flattering around you ; but in its stead have arisen other things of enduring substance, and “houses not made with hands.” It has unlocked your arms, as they clung, with the desperation of a startled earthly love, about the forms of your beloved ; but, even while your streaming eyes have watched their receding shapes, their spirits, arrayed in incorruption, have glided back to your side, to go no more away. It has humbled your proud will in the dust, and mocked at the feeble striving of your intellectual power, and left you at times alone in a desolate universe ; but, at the first prayer of faith, that uni-

verse became alive with the presence of God; and when, like a little child, you confessed your ignorance, was felt the dawning of a higher wisdom; and when you became content to lose your pride, did you first awake to the sense of your true dignity as a son of the Most High. And so has sorrow gone on, overturning, one by one, the walls you had so proudly built around yourself; and yet each was a wall of separation between you and heaven, and now the last has fallen, and the prospect is no longer obstructed that widens before you, stretching to the promised Canaan, while you have learned enough in this discipline to bless your Father that you were accounted worthy of chastisement. Let those complain who live in the circle of little desires and trifling discomforts; you are seeking a nobler good, and yours is that calm and wise contentment in which the instructed and purified soul at last reposes; that state of inward tranquillity which no shock from abroad can disturb; that trusting mood of heart in which approaching trial is seen only with uplifted eyes, and a reverent awaiting for the new gift of which it is the inspired bearer. And you, of all others, will ask, "Wherefore," in affliction, "doth a living man complain?"

Such is life, regarded as a whole, and as a state subject to sin and sorrow; and from neither point of view can a complaining spirit receive countenance. But, in justice to our existence, I must not rest with the presentation of that portion which is confined by time and space, since

immortality has been "brought to light." Let me, then, speak a moment of the relation which this greatest of facts, the eternity of being, bears to my subject, and thus present the final demonstration of the unreasonableness of complaint.

This argument is, in truth, but an expansion of those already offered; since the immortal life is only the continuation of the earthly existence, subject to the same laws of being, and directed by the same Providence. Then all I have said of the value of life itself, and of its possibilities, is only to be accepted and carried out. If it be a cause of thankfulness that we exist, how much greater should it be that our being is secured against the danger of annihilation; that, both on the side of the past and the future, we have escaped the awful gulf of non-existence! If, in a world so circumscribed as this, we acknowledge it a great privilege to possess and use our faculties, what emotions of gratitude should we feel when this possession and employment are insured to us forever! If the heights and depths of knowledge, beauty, and love, now make us fall upon our knees and worship, what shall we say of a state of being in which the goal of our acquisitions here shall be the starting-point of an endless progression! Thus is everything good in life secured and expanded to infinity by this revelation of immortality.

And, in our estimate of the origin and results of evil, the argument from the experience of time is confirmed by the promised issues of eternity. For it is folly to believe

that this moral freedom, which is our highest glory, and does much to reconcile us to the existence of temptation in this world, should ever be taken from us; and why should the discipline of sorrow be less elevating, when the limitations of days and years are removed from around it, and it is introduced into relations entirely spiritual? And more than this; since our vision, bounded by the horizon lines of earth, can see enough of good in evil to reconcile the Christian heart to its existence, may we not confidently predict that in the same immortality which is the pledge of an infinite good will also be found the consistent explanation of its opposite? Who will dare to say that the apparent contradictions existing now in God's scheme of government shall continue to vex man forever?

Here, then, is found the crowning point of the argument against complaint; in the revelation of an immortal life for man, subject to the love of God, where good shall increase, and evil shall decrease; where, as ages roll on, the wise and holy plans of the Deity shall gradually be developed before the minds of his creatures; and when contradictions no longer exist, to task the human faculties, an infinity of knowledge yet lies around the spirit, yearning for a higher wisdom and a deeper love. So the last pretext is removed from him who would complain; for is it not the lowest depth of folly, that a being in the earliest state of an infinite series of existence should murmur because his eyes cannot pierce at a glance into those regions which the vision of the All-seeing only can reach?

Here, then, let the heart of the Christian repose in the assurance of his immortal life of labor directed by the love of a heavenly Father.

“*Wherefore,*” then, “*doth a living man complain?*” Is this train of reasoning I have presented so uncertain or so incomprehensible that we cannot all see its force, of ourselves? Certainly not; for many a man, not instructed in the wisdom of the world, has received much more from the assurance of a confiding faith. No, brethren, it is not because we are unable to see the folly of our discontent, if we will, that we still live in it. It is because we have voluntarily given away our hearts to temporal interests, and weakened our minds by the constant contemplation of trifling subjects, and driven off the Holy Spirit when it came to us! We have come down into a sensual life, full of uncheered toils, and unexplained vexations, and fleeting pleasures, and now complain because we find not in it even the low amusement we sought! It is not that the sun has ceased to shine, and the earth to blossom, as of old; but that we have gone, of ourselves, into a dark wood, whose gloomy branches shut out the light at mid-day, and where we stumble over rocks, and struggle through sharp thorns, and sink in miry bogs! Methinks a wise man will not waste his life in complaints, in such a dismal place, but will make the best of his way out of it! Methinks it were well for us to live in a little nobler style; to break out of this net of worldly cares, and be sure that we know what is the life of the soul, before we arraign

the providence of God, and add blasphemy to our already accumulated mass of sins !

Then why should I not close by repeating to you what every good man, your own soul, and your God, are always telling you,—that the only refuge from the vexations and sorrows of the world is found in holiness of life ? For only the saint has full command of his own spirit ; only to him is life a promise of infinite possibilities of excellence ; only he can feel how noble it is to put the tempter under his feet ; and to him alone does sorrow unveil her mysteries ; and his is the eye that blends earth and heaven in one infinite prospect, brightening as it recedes. Come, then, my brother, now so full of care, to whom complaint is a luxury, and life a weariness, come up from your slavery to things temporal into the glorious liberty of things eternal. Forgetting what you suffer, ask yourself what you are. Forbearing this strife with little annoyances or graver difficulty, arouse all your energies, and wage war upon your sin. Ceasing this jealous opposition of personal inclinations, do good to all men ; and, caring not for ease, but only anxious to do your duty, humble your proud will before the will of God. Then will you know that in escaping from your sins your sorrows have lost their power to annoy ; that in loving man you have first known how much good is in him ; and, in obedience to your Father's law, you have found that peace which "passeth understanding." Then will your complaints be turned into thanksgivings, and your

heart be at rest; and your daily labor shall be an offering of sacrifice; and joy shall only direct you to the Giver of good; and in the night time of sorrow, and amid the falling shadows of death, shall you feel the embracing arms of your Almighty Deliverer.

XVIII.

STRENGTH IN SORROW.

“But Jesus, turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”—
LUKE 23 : 28.

THESE words were addressed by Jesus Christ to the women who followed him to the cross, weeping and lamenting. With his usual forgetfulness of self, their sorrow made him insensible to his own. He saw, too, the great calamities that were impending over the Jewish nation. He knew that a day of desolation was coming upon that devoted people, which would put to proof all their power of endurance. Therefore, he would rather see his friends reserving their energies to meet this terrible crisis than wasting them in unavailing complaints for him; and he says to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

But this expression contains a higher meaning than the context would immediately suggest. In fact, every remark of the Saviour, whether called out by some actual occurrence or uttered in the style of a moral precept, contains a deep spiritual meaning. He was so full of life that he

could not speak otherwise than profoundly, or act otherwise than nobly. If we do not always discover the spiritual sense of his words, it is no proof that there is not such a meaning, only that we do not see it; for we cannot expect to fully understand those precepts which come from the depths of the greatest soul that ever dwelt upon earth, until we have prepared ourselves by holiness and submission, and been yet further qualified by a searching religious experience.

I do not, therefore, look upon the words of my text as a mere expression of compassion, or a prediction of great calamities about to befall the followers of Jesus. It, doubtless, contains both these elements; and some of those who heard it may have perceived nothing more in it, as many do not who now read it; but it is, nevertheless, the utterance of a great spiritual fact, a fact that every man will understand as soon as he is able to see it.

This fact is, that men who are brought into great trials and afflictions by Providence are not proper subjects for compassion; that pity for them implies a distrust of God's benevolence; that they may have a strength which elevates them far above mortal weakness; that the tears wept for them should be poured out for the sins and weakness of those who weep. Was not this the meaning of Jesus? Look upon him for a moment. His enemies are leading him to crucifixion; the mocking and the scourging are over, and the hour of sacrifice is approaching. He walks by the side of the man who bears the cross; the multitude

throng behind ;— his enemies, who now think to be rid of him ; his friends, who have lived in his heavenly society, and are overwhelmed at the dreadful thought of separation. He turns around and looks upon them. Is there any weakness in that face, lit up with resignation and faith, as if heaven were already opening upon it ? Look upon that multitude, and tell me who there is so calm and strong as he, going to a shameful death ? Does he need compassion ?— he, to whom the glories of the future are revealed, as he walks there in communion with his Maker ? O, no ! reserve your tears for those about him. Weep for those poor men who are so blinded by their sins that they cannot see the loveliness of God beaming in the face of his Son. Weep for those who are not strong enough to catch the inspiration of their Master's faith, but see in the most notable event in the world's history only the cruel death which separates them from their teacher.

This strength was not given alone to the Saviour of men ; it has been bestowed upon every child of sorrow since the creation of the world. Was ever a man brought into great straits of labor, of trial, of suffering, who did not feel that when he cast himself on God he was strong ? Read the history of the world, and learn that its noblest spirits have passed through discouragement, persecution and agony, to their greatness ; and yet none have been so firm as they. While the crowd of weak men have stood in the plains and valleys beating their breasts, and bewailing the sufferings of their idols, they have been toiling up

the steep mountain-cliffs of existence, their hands and feet bleeding, their bodies wearied, but their faces lifted to heaven. Look into private life, and who are your strongest and most beautiful natures there? Those whose path from childhood up has been thick set with rocks and thorns, but who, in humble reliance upon divine mercy, have walked on, and are now the greatest of all. Are such men subjects for compassion? Does he need my pity who is listening to the voice of his Creator in the silence that comes after a great trial? Does Milton need compassion, sitting in his blindness amid floating visions of Heaven and Paradise? Shall I pour out tears upon the dungeon-bars of Tasso, while his soul is away at Jerusalem among heroes and saints, and deeds of more than human valor? Can I comfort Paul, when, at the end of a wearisome life, he cries, "The time of my departure is at hand"? Shall I dare to disturb with my weakness the lofty peace of the Saviour of men, as he is led to Mount Calvary? Methinks I might as well weep that *I* am no better, that my faith is so low, my view of life so mean; or for those around me, who lie bound in their sins, from whom love and obedience seem to have fled. Weep not for the afflicted who dwells with his God, but for the sinful one who lives in darkness and moral destitution.

Let me call your attention to this great distinction between affliction and sin, for it lies at the foundation of the doctrine I would enforce.

When I speak of affliction, I mean some painful trial.

sent to us by Providence, something which no foresight of ours could have averted, whether it be in the form of an interruption of our plans, the loss of our health, a sympathetic sorrow for the sufferings of others, or the death of our friends. In all such cases the suffering comes from no *wilful* violation of God's laws, and cannot, therefore, be looked upon as a punishment for transgression. When I speak of the consequences of sin, I mean the results of our deliberate wrong-doing. In such cases we know the right way, and voluntarily forsake it. We may not, at the time, apprehend all the suffering our sin will bring upon us, but this is no excuse; for we should obey conscience because it is the voice of God, not from any calculation of reward or punishment.

I am the more desirous to impress this distinction between affliction and the consequences of sin upon your minds, because we have now-a-days a set of philosophers who, in their anxiety to reduce the events of life to an orderly system, look upon all human suffering as unnecessary, as the result of the violation of natural laws. Whether this position is correct in itself, is a great question, and cannot be determined until we have answered another — Whether man was created for happiness? It appears to me, with the light I now have, that the advocates of such a theory of life are in a great error, exactly in this point, in their estimate of the purpose of life. I cannot believe that happiness is the highest thing in the universe, even though it may always accompany the high-

est things. Duty is higher. Holiness, the development of our nature, is the end to be aimed at, and happiness generally follows it, like a graceful attendant. But, to mistake this secondary gratification for the end of existence, is only a development of the epicure's philosophy, who, in the delicious taste of food, forgets that its only purpose is to sustain life; and so, instead of "eating to live," "lives to eat."

But, if the abstract statement of this theory presents difficulties to the Christian philosopher, much more does the form which it assumes in many minds expose it to our reprobation. For these wise men have come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as Providence in the world; that all our joys are purchased by obedience to, and all our sorrows brought upon ourselves by the infringement of, these natural laws. Thus there can be no distinction between the consequences of affliction and sin. A man suffers, not from any purpose in the Creator to discipline him, but because he or his ancestors have sinned. But where the justice lies of sending trials upon me for no other result than to inform me that my father was a transgressor, is a point which I have never heard explained. In fact, the whole theory, in this form, encounters the objection of not recognizing the mission of suffering in our spiritual development. It is poor consolation, when I am standing by the bed-side of a dying friend, to tell me that his death is caused by a violation of certain physical laws in the person of his remote ancestor. Perhaps it is so,—

I will not dispute the fact; but I ask, is this all? Is there no holier lesson to be learned from the death-bed of a saint than a lecture upon the preservation of health? Suppose I admit your theory of natural laws — what then? Is my Father in heaven only a legislator, who establishes certain regulations, and creates men to illustrate them? I admit that there is order in the creation; but that order is enfolded by the infinite providence of God, who makes every event serve a double purpose, and while He inflicts the penalty of his unconsciously violated law, is thereby preparing the soul, through suffering, to dwell in the high region of truth and holiness. Nothing of the kind we have mentioned will account for the prevalence of affliction, or satisfy the religious sense. The spirit of man demands a Providence, a particular Providence; and, until it can be assured of this, is lost in the chaos of events around it. There is a limit even to free will, a point beyond which we feel that we are powerless, where all we can do is to bow in reverence before our Creator, and receive what he sends us with thankfulness and submission.

I shall, therefore, not hesitate to say, that affliction and sin are two things; the former is sent by God, the latter we take upon ourselves. The former is given from abroad, especially for our discipline in virtue; the latter, if it ever becomes a discipline, becomes so by the exercise of our own will. In one case, God leads us into darkness that we may learn to lean upon Him, that our vision may become purified from earthly obstructions to look upon

spiritual objects; in the other, we run into darkness away from God, and stumble and fall, and lie there, bleeding and weary, until we pray to Him, and try to rise and return to the light.

And herein is the reason that we have strength given in affliction. It is sent for our discipline. It first changes our relations to this world. It takes away money, health, or friends, whatever we most relied upon. We are then for a season cut off from the world. With the departure of our idols everything else seems to go, and we are left alone with God. Then, if we are true to ourselves, we open our eyes, and see things we never saw before. Then first dawns upon us the greatness of spiritual things—of truth, love, duty, and submission to Heaven. Then, feeling the uncertainty of earthly possessions, we first sincerely ask, "Is there nothing after this life?" And then gradually to our straining vision the present narrows itself to a point in eternity, and the past and future open in infinite perspective. We see the everlasting series of existence, rising world above world; we see the friends we have lost laboring in other spheres, working out their destiny beneath the eye of the Great Father. Then the soul expands, and we know our own greatness; and in this sublime thought the things of earth assume their proper proportions, and our personal sorrows are absorbed in the contemplation of our infinite existence and glorious destiny. Is he who is thus introduced into the region of realities a subject for pity? Can he turn from the great meditations

that fill his soul to weep with you? No; he has already passed into the eternal life, where there is no more sorrow, only labor and love!

But, alas for the sinful man, for him who has walked away from God into darkness! For him is only a deeper and deeper experience of suffering, sorrow, and humiliation, and self-reproach, and a sense of estrangement from his Maker. The light from heaven daily becomes more dim, the clouds more dismal that draw around him. O, weep for him; for, until he turns and fights his way out of that dreadful darkness, he is miserable indeed! Do not cling around the feet of him whose eyes are lifted on high, for you will only drag him downward; but go to him who is wandering about the pit of destruction, and let your tears and entreaties recall him from its brink. Reform your own lives, and try to go up where your afflicted brother is, instead of calling him back to a world of unreal things and vanishing shows!

I have spoken of the strength that comes to a man in affliction. But we must distinctly understand one thing: it comes only to him who seeks it by self-renunciation, by prayer to God, by perfect submission to his will, by a life of active duty. Affliction is the best or the worst thing for us, according to the use we make of it. If we shut ourselves away from humanity, and think only of our personal loss, and give ourselves up to grief, and encourage our weakness by every method; if we distrust the providence of God, and say that we have nothing now to

live for, and that duty is no longer pleasant, we shall be left to such a desolation as comes only to a heart filled with selfishness, and forsaken by Heaven. God has no compassion upon our want of faith, our sentimental weakness. These we feel because our lives have not been spiritual. Because we have always lived in the dust, we cannot rise above it. If we will shut ourselves in the tomb of our friend, and dwell there with bones, and shrouds, and decaying flesh, no good angel will open the door, and our souls will become a part of the general corruption. But if we use the little strength we have in works of love, and pray God for more; if we go down into the depths of our spirit, and invoke the mighty reserved energies of our being; if we forget ourselves in thinking of the grandeur of life, the worth of virtue, the immortality of the soul; a strength, we shall not know from what source, will come to us, and we shall feel that we were never before so great, so peacefully, truly happy, so at one with God and so bound to man, as in the moment of our greatest bereavement. I would not harshly censure the indulgence of sorrow. I know the weakness of our human nature; but I only state the eternal law, and tell you where strength lies, if you will reach up to it.

The experience of any one who hears me will verify this doctrine of my discourse, that those who are afflicted in any manner, and receive their trial in a Christian spirit, are made stronger by it than they ever were before, and are, therefore, not proper objects for compassion.

How often have we seen this in one of the greatest afflictions connected with our present order of society — the loss of fortune, and the consequent loss of social position. I can hardly conceive a more severe trial of a man's Christian patience and fortitude than, in the maturity of his powers, and the midst of great influence, surrounded by many friends, to be suddenly reduced to poverty by one of those fluctuations of commerce which now occur almost every day. For this foolish world of ours has not yet learned that the contents of a man's soul are of more value than the contents of his pocket, and when the latter becomes empty they say he has *failed*; an expression which, to many people, is synonymous with spiritual failure, especially if the man does not show financial skill enough to regain his former position.

So great is this trial, that few men are strong enough to sustain it. Many can retrieve their loss, and become rich again; but few can live in poverty the remainder of their days without becoming discouraged, or restive, or misanthropic. Yet, look at the true Christian when such an event befalls him. He calmly surveys his position, and tries to discover the cause of his deprivation. He sees that it was sent to teach him some great truth. He was becoming proud, or hard-hearted, or too devoted to gain, or the circle in which he moved was not the best for the development of his nature. It was necessary at that period that his associations should be broken up, and he be thrown into the midst of a new set of circumstances.

All this he sees, and then, like a man, endeavors to make the most of the advantages around him. He does not spend life among the ghosts of his old pleasures, or in foolish struggles to regain the little consequence he has lost; but cheerfully studies the new minds around him, and the kind of life he must now live. And how soon do we perceive the results of such a course. The man who was driven about with love for gold, or fear of men and customs, is now transformed to a calm and active Christian. The wife who spent her life in nervous complainings and constant vexations, now arouses herself, and becomes a noble, self-denying mother, a blessing to her partner, and an honor to her sex. The children are rescued from the contamination of an artificial life, and grow up pure, beautiful, and great. This is not a fancy sketch; it is attainable in every case where the endeavor is sincerely made; and I feel I should insult your religious sense if I asked you whether this family had lost anything, whether they were fit objects for your pity. No; men have cast them out of the market-place, and God has taken them into his holy of holies, where they will dwell with Him above the vulgar noise and strife of material things.

Then there is that affliction of sickness, of long-protracted debility, with its melancholy train of depressed spirits, a sense of being useless in the world, a longing for more life or for death, neither of which comes; with moments and days of strength, in which the spirit kindles up

and forms a thousand plans, and builds a city glittering with spires and turrets, which vanishes away on some morning when returning consciousness brings back the old weakness; with seclusion from society and nature, and, at times, almost from God, where the body is so weak that the spirit cannot have faith.


But, my friend, before you pity that afflicted one, try to look into his soul. You will see there, perhaps, a strength to which your own is weakness. What though the glare and bustle of life are shut out from him, if angels come from heaven and fill the darkened room, and sweet thoughts go out and wander at will through the lovely places of earth, even into the "world we have not seen"? What though he is withdrawn from daily intercourse with nature, if every sunbeam that steals over his bed awakens a thrill of gratitude, and every flower seems a direct gift from the Author of beauty? What though the crowd of men walk carelessly by the door of the sufferer's dwelling, if one or two loving ones will go in and open to him the rich depths of a religious experience, and make him feel the blessing of that true mingling of hearts so little known in our sinful state? I do not say that sickness is always better than health; but *I know* that when God sends it, he sends a strength with it which often elevates the soul as far above the reach of compassion as the heavens are above the earth.

And then comes that great terror of our mortal existence, death; and the one we love best must go and work

in another vineyard, while we endure the burden and heat of the day alone. But I need not tell you that if you look this fearful thing in the face, and call to God for help, you will overcome it, and become greater than ever before. For, if we are leaning upon others, or living too selfishly, or yielding to temptation, or becoming restrained or restraining another in the pursuit of the spiritual life, it is a blessing that we should be left alone with our Maker long enough to learn our duty, and be awakened to our destiny. And let me tell you that he whose approving conscience sings him to sleep every night, and whom every morning's sun awakens to the cheerful performance of duty, to whom life every day appears richer, and immortality more actual, and God more present, will not long be very much disturbed by even this greatest of trials. He is introduced into the same world with the departed,—the world of spiritual realities, of pure affections, of heavenly intercourse with the Universal Father. And if he can remain good, and retain his power to labor, do not fear that God will let him sink, for he “has given his angels charge over him, and in their hands will they bear him up.”

The conclusion of all this is, we have nothing to fear or to lament greatly in this world but sin. God takes care of the afflicted that come to him, and your duty in respect to them is to direct them to the true source of life, to awaken their energies, to urge them on to greater exertions than they have ever made. You are not fulfilling a Christian obligation when you surround an afflicted one with badges

of mourning, and lamentations, and services which increase his weakness, rather than impart strength; but you are doing it when you convince him that his affliction is his great privilege, that he may now go nearer God than you. I cannot but think that the prevalent view of life and its trials is essentially heathen. The spirit with which we go to our sacrifices is not that in which the Saviour cried as Judas went out to betray him, "*Now is the Son of Man glorified!*" We are content to be merry, and live on good terms with our sins, but we are cowards in our sorrows! We run after and worship a man, and rejoice at his prosperity if he is successful, even at the expense of becoming sensual and earthly; but the blow of Providence that drives him out of this false way of life into a situation where he can become a Christian again if he will, is a signal for an uproar of lamentation as great as if the sky had fallen upon our heads! This is not religion; it is irreligion, weakness, the want of faith in God; for, I repeat it, sin is the only great evil, and affliction comes to aid and exalt. So has it been to every faithful child of man since the world began; so was it with Jesus Christ; for when he overcame his great agony, and said, "Not my will but thine be done," "there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening him."



XIX.

VOICES FROM THE DEPARTED.


“It is expedient for you that I go away ; for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but, if I depart, I will send him unto you.” — JOHN 16 : 7.

THESE words were spoken by Jesus Christ to his disciples, a little while before his crucifixion. Their faith was not strong enough to contemplate his departure with calmness ; therefore, he endeavored to strengthen it, by assuring them that they should not be left alone. The Comforter would come, which should console them for his absence, and lead them into a knowledge of all truth.

I do not regard this promise as limited to the special gifts which the disciples of Jesus afterwards received. It expresses a fact as true now as then. The Master doubtless referred to the various influences which the death of the great and good have upon the living, — a class of influences so peculiar and elevating that it is not the language of exaggeration to say concerning every noble soul that goes from us, “It is expedient that it go away ; for, if it go not away, the Comforter will not come.” There are many things, — perhaps the best things about the great

and good,—that we cannot know until they have ceased to live upon the earth ; and there is an intercourse which requires for its perfection an intervening distance as great as that between this world and another. I will now invite your attention to some of the methods by which the dead yet speak to us.

And, first, I will mention the effect of absence itself, in giving definiteness to our conception of human character. We cannot fully understand the nature of a person who is always with us, especially of one we love. Our own thoughts and feelings and theirs become mysteriously intermingled ; and what we regard as a manifestation of their spirit is often only a reflection of our own. If the friend be greatly superior to us, we are apt to be overcome with his greatness, and, losing ourselves, to ascribe to him the knowledge and virtues of both ; if inferior, we are slow to believe in the existence of any native strength where we have seen only weakness and dependence. Thus the boundary lines of our individuality become confused, and a variety of false impressions assume the force of realities. There is such a thing as living too near the best man. I know that many, who have warm affections and little self-reliance, think they cannot be too much in the society of their friends. They love to bury themselves in another's wisdom or affection, and almost lose consciousness of their own identity in the happiness of receiving. But a man who truly respects himself knows that no relation, however intimate, with another, can take



the place of a Christian self-reliance. Therefore, he never is merged in the being of his friend, but remains himself. There are lines drawn around our souls which we cannot safely overleap. Standing upon our own manhood, we can love God and man, and be exalted by communion with them; but if we try to throw ourselves into God, or live in the life of any human being, we only lose that manhood, and with it everything worth possessing.

Thus we see that absence is as necessary to a correct appreciation of our friends as their society; for only in this manner can we know exactly what they are, and preserve our own individuality. When one we have greatly loved and revered goes away, and we have no hope of meeting him again in this life, our latent energies awaken. We feel that we must either stand alone or fall, and involuntarily make a great effort towards the former. And, when we have recovered our own poise, we can begin to estimate the actual value of the departed one. For now we see in what respects we are strong or weak, and perhaps discover that we have many of the things we most admired in him, or that he was aiding us in a manner of which we had no conception. As nature reasserts her rightful authority over us, this perception becomes clearer. Away from our friend, his mental and moral qualities arrange themselves in harmonious proportions, the uncertainty and vagueness which always accompany anxious earthly love clear away, and gradually the beautiful character stands revealed for our admiration and improvement.

When we go too near a fine picture all the details become confused,— the gradation of color is lost, the outlines run into each other, and it appears only like a canvas blotted with different kinds of paint; but, if we retire to a proper distance, and stand in the true position, the unmeaning lines and glaring colors are transformed into a beautiful landscape. So we may cling so closely to our friends that we lose all correct perception of their worth, and should never know them did not our Father wisely place between us barriers which, although transparent to the eye of faith, are impassable to mortal strength.


It is often necessary that the distance between ourselves and those we love and revere the most should be so great as to throw us entirely upon ourselves; and such a separation is death. In such cases we really suffer no loss; for the value of a friend is not in his outward form, but in what he does for us and what he is. We may be living so near him that we should never get anything more from him; our nature may be filled to repletion with his thought and love, and his continuance would only debilitate us. In the state of intense mental and moral activity which accompanies the highest form of human love, we receive impressions much faster than we can arrange and apply them. If this process continued, we should, by-and-by, become confused. But, if the beloved one is taken away, it may be that we shall find we have received enough from him in the few years of his society to satisfy us during a long life. I know this is true. There are people now

living whose death, perhaps, would do me as much good as their life ; for, in an hour's conversation, they give me the materials for a month's thought ; and I can look back upon many years of such intercourse. There are friends who have left me, that I loved too well to know perfectly on earth, but whose characters now become more distinct and glowing every day ; for they are opening before me deeper and wider, and it seems as if I were to stand watching them all my life, as I would the slow rising of a sun that was to shine through eternity ! Thus is the absence of the great and good necessary to a perfect comprehension of their worth. Truly, then, they go away only to come nearer ; and we exchange the uncertain and shadowy knowledge of them we had upon earth, for a sure, distinct, and ever increasing perception of their spiritual worth. "*If I go not away,*" said Jesus, "*the Comforter will not come.*"

This species of influence is independent of the continued personal interest, or even existence, of our departed friends. It comes from the clearing up of our own minds. But there are other methods by which they move us. It is useless to ascribe all our feelings concerning them to the mere recollection of what they were. When we meditate upon their characters, and ask ourselves if so much truth and love is forever gone away from us, we often obtain the assurance that it has not. A response comes from the depth of our being to the longings of our bereaved affection, which, by the peace it brings, is proved worthy of

reverence. I cannot say how much I believe or disbelieve in regard to our intercourse with the departed. Whether they are really permitted to be near, or, from some distant field of labor, see more of us than we see of them; how much of our encouragement in hours of despondency, or how much of our strength in hours of temptation, we owe to them;—these are questions upon which it does not become any man to tell all he believes. It is not well to put out the most sacred and mysterious emotions of our souls into the critical atmosphere of the world. But we may reasonably believe some things, and openly express our belief in them; while to the existence of more sacred longings and assurances we may appeal when our reasoning fails to satisfy the anxious spirit.

It is certainly not unreasonable to suppose that our departed friends still retain an interest in us, and are permitted, in some way, to assist us. Of course, in this statement, I assume the fact of a personal immortal existence, which I cannot deny consistently with my belief in Christianity. For, however different may be the circumstances in which they are placed, whatever new relations they may form, however rapidly they may advance in knowledge and goodness, it is impossible to believe they can outgrow a genuine love. I doubt not that death will dissolve many earthly friendships, based upon interest, or merely intellectual sympathy. The former require a peculiar arrangement of circumstances to insure their existence; the latter depend upon relative degrees of



mental advancement. But love is not the union of common earthly wants, or the meeting of intellects, but the mingling of two entire natures. It does not depend altogether upon mental and moral conditions. We may convince ourselves that the object of our affection is utterly unworthy of it; love stands aside, hears the argument and the condemnation, and then, returning, folds the unworthy one closer to her breast. We may be assured that no change of circumstance, and no increase of power, will alienate our departed ones from us. Whether they are permitted to do much or little for our improvement, the desire to aid us will not perish. For the highest love is not distressed by absence, is not anxious about the welfare of its objects, is patient and content to wait God's time for its fruition. Yet, why should not they who are gone be permitted to assist us? Will not a merciful Father allow them to give us, now and then, the benefit of their clearer knowledge and calmer faith? Will He decree the existence of longings which are not to be satisfied? When one moment of blessed communion will raise a spirit bowed to the earth by doubt, or sorrow, or sin, will He not grant it? I will believe it; for my own deep necessities assure me that He will never leave them long unsatisfied.

I may say, then, that it is not unreasonable to suppose our departed friends still retain their interest in us, and are permitted to assist us. I have not proved this, perhaps, for all that can be done by logic in the matter is to show that

the supposition is not unreasonable. I believe it to be true upon other grounds,—upon the testimony of a large class of emotions and spiritual experiences with which every bereaved soul is acquainted, and which I would rather appeal to than attempt to translate into words.


There are, in the life of every one who has lost a beloved friend, moments of intense desire for his society. When we are painfully reaching after truth, and the intellect, baffled at every turn, at last becomes tired, and sinks down, and cries out in its humiliation for the smallest gift from that treasury of knowledge it proudly thought to exhaust alone; when the troubles of the world make us feel as if we were only standing here to be worn out by the slow rubbing of petty vexations, and disappointed hopes, and unfinished labors; when a sense of guilt benumbs every energy, and steals the joy out of life, and makes us feel that our souls are not worth the rousing of the will to save them; at such times, when we are too desolate to go to living men, and too full of humility to go to God, we long for the consoling presence of those who were once with us and are now with the Father, that their human love and their divine experience may reconcile us again to life. And I know that these longings are not disregarded; for, when I have been in such great doubt, I have been raised up by a gleam of truth; and, when my sorrow has been the greatest, it has insensibly changed to an elevated repose; and, when I most despaired of purity, my will has started up as if from the contact

with angelic virtue. And, all the while, my best friend was in my thought, and seemed to stand by my side. And not alone in hours of difficulty and sorrow have I seemed to recognize this presence. When joy has risen so high that it was fast becoming pain, because there was no one near to share it with, suddenly there came to my soul the assurance that it was shared with one who was invisible; and, when I have been borne along, as by a strong wind, through regions of high thought, I have felt that a mind was near me, looking down upon human things as they gradually unfolded into harmony and beauty; and, when I have talked with dear friends till our thought and feeling came so near that words were too slow to express it, with the growing silence another seemed to come into the room and sit with us, and the chain of love bore round from heart to heart what none of us could say; and, when in prayer to God my soul has passed out of the world, I have heard in my spirit the sound of the old voice that once whispered its petitions by my side. I do not question these heavenly visitants. I listen to what they tell me. I only know afterwards that I am stronger and calmer, as I always was after their presence upon earth. I will not dispute with him who says all this is the result of my excited feelings and disordered imagination; but I think I know how to distinguish the two states of mind. The one leaves me lower than it found me; the other bears me to an elevation from which I never descend. In the one I climb a mountain,

and stand a moment upon its peak ; in the other the earth rises slowly beneath me, and bears me with it, and does not recede. I know this is true in the same way I know that God exists, that duty is a reality, and immortality is not a dream ; because such a belief is necessary to my existence ; because, without it, life would be aimless, helpless, and worthless, and, with it, significant, strong, and glorious ; because, in my highest moments, I have no doubt of it. I am willing to reverence my best thoughts and deepest love, for what they tell me of such things is the best I have ; and, I doubt not, is the voice of God.

By such methods as I have now described do the departed continue to exert an influence upon us. Their virtues shine with a brighter light after they have left us ; and, by various tokens, more easily felt than described, they prove their interest in our welfare. Their visitations are known only to the spirit ; their voices are heard, not by the world, but by ourselves alone. A great compensation indeed is it for the desolation of the outward life, that our inner life thereby becomes more satisfying and real. God never takes a beloved object from the eyes of our flesh, without soon giving it back, more beautiful than ever, to the eyes of the spirit.

Yet, my brethren, all this I have now said for your consolation must be said conditionally. I must tell you, in conclusion, that you will know your departed friends better, and feel their presence, only when you are prepared for



the knowledge by increasing piety and benevolence. I do not wonder that worldly and wicked men mourn over their dead as lost. Lost indeed are they, if the living make no effort to go to them. He whose ear is ringing with the clamor of earthly business, and the wrangling of self with neighbor, cannot hear the low, sweet voices that float from the spirit land. He for whom money and power and pleasure are all-sufficient, will never be disturbed by the society of angels. Lost are they whom he once loved, because he has lost himself. But not so with the Christian. For he who tries to keep his life sacred by prayer, and by acts of disinterestedness would relieve the heaviness of daily cares, shall be refreshed by the same love that once spoke with him face to face. Using the world aright, he shall no longer be burthened with it; and, going out to meet every duty, he shall not be confused by his work; and many an hour of repose shall be his, when he shall live in the spirit with those who have put off the body. It is only our ignorance and sin that make this world so gross and this life so barren. Knowledge and virtue will dissolve material barriers, and marry earth and heaven. And so to the Christian, purified by suffering, comes, at last, a perfect faith and an undisturbed peace; and the veil is taken from his senses, and around him walk the great and good, living and dead; and the cadence of heavenly voices mingles with his earthly converse, and he sees, rank above rank, the ascending orders of creation, in ways innumerable, fulfilling the

designs of Providence; and, beyond all, a great light, as from the throne of God, flowing down and irradiating all things, shining through the darkness of the grave, and revealing the glories of the eternity to come.


XX.

THE WALK TO EMMAUS.

“And behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus ; and they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass that, while they communed together, and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden, that they should not know him.”—LUKE 24 : 13—17.

THERE is no scene in the recorded life of Jesus Christ and his apostles more affecting than the account of the walk to Emmaus, after the resurrection ; and could we read it, with all its accompanying circumstances in mind, I do not believe it would ever be forgotten. I will now invite you to follow me as I try to recall some of its features. Let us endeavor to shut off the great world that surrounds us without the walls of our house of worship, and yield ourselves, for a time, to the simple beauty of this old narrative, and meditate upon the significance it bears for our spiritual life ; for our Master never did an insignificant thing. He could not walk with two of his disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus without doing what would become memorable to all future time.

“And behold,” says the Evangelist, “two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus; and they talked together of all these things which had happened.” And how sad was their speech as they walked together; for their conversation was of their crucified Lord. Their Master, who had called them from the rest of the world to follow him; who had so patiently instructed them into the mysterious things of the kingdom of heaven; had borne with their ignorance, their ambition, and their worldliness; had inspired them in their fear with the promise of help from God, and cheered them in their grief by the assurance of immortality; had even unrolled before them, a little way, the scroll of the ages to come, and pointed to the blazing letters in which were written the triumph of his religion, and the ruin of all that now seemed so permanent in the world,— words not fully comprehended by them, yet filling their souls with strange joys and hopes; he at whose word the waves of the sea had become calm, and fainting thousands had been refreshed with bread, and health had flowed into the veins of men wasted by disease, and light had broken in upon minds clouded with insanity, and the arms of weeping friends had enfolded the forms of those whom death could not hold within the tomb; he whose wonderful works were only the beginning of a series of acts at which the nations should be astonished, whose words of wisdom were only the whispering of a voice which should be heard giving the law from Mount Zion through the whole earth; whose power, and good-



ness, and celestial presence, declared him to be the Saviour and Redeemer of Israel;—He was now dead! They had seen him borne away from the Garden at midnight, not resisting, though he had told them legions of angels were at his command; some of them had looked on, while the crown of thorns was placed upon his head, and the soldiers scourged and smote him; afar off had they followed him ascending Mount Calvary, and seen him suspended above his cruel murderers between the two thieves, and, it may be, had heard his cry of anguish before he “gave up the ghost.” And then they had gone away sorrowful, yet with a dim hope that on the third day he would still be restored to them. But the women had gone to the sepulchre and seen only the linen clothes lying there,—their Master gone, stolen! Some impious hand had “taken away their Lord;” and even the last sad offices of humanity were denied them. Yet while they wept there, they had been told that their “Lord was risen,” and would again be seen by them.

It was of these things the two disciples spoke as they walked to Emmaus, sad and doubtful, their great hopes overthrown, their friends dispersed, even their dead Master taken away. “And it came to pass that, while they communed together, and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden, that they should not know him.” He asked them of what they talked; and when they told him, he began out of the prophets to instruct them of what should have happened.

As he spoke, their hearts acknowledged again the presence of the old Master, and "burned within them;" yet they knew him not. So deeply had the melancholy events of the last few days sunk into their minds; so anxious, and confused, and heart-broken were they, that they did not recognize their Master. Yet there he walked by their side, and the full stream of his speech came flowing in upon their souls; yea, was he even talking of himself, and reconciling them to the pain of separation from him. It was afterwards that their eyes were opened, and they knew that he who had spoken to them was none other than Jesus Christ, their crucified and risen Saviour.


Strange, indeed, we may think it was, that those two disciples could walk so near their Master, and hear the sound of his voice, and not know him; yet the same thing has happened to you and me. Often in our lives have we walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, by the side of our Lord, so absorbed in selfish sorrows or worldly musings, that our "eyes have been holden," and we have not known who it was. For, when Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, he did not go to remain there in a solitary glory forever. Still, though unseen, he walks the earth, with the spirits of others great and good. And in ways many and significant does he now talk with men,—by the power of his truth, by the depth of his infinite love, by the memory of his spotless life, his cruel death, his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, through words spoken by the lips of inspired men in our day and days gone by, in mo-

nitions of conscience,—in many ways now doth our Lord walk with us, and talk to us, and we know him not. O, this our journey of life is not so poor as we think it; for, as we go carelessly and sadly down the road towards death, a great crowd of invisible ones are beside us, and perchance even our Master is not far off,—it may be he is now speaking at our side !

Our Lord Jesus Christ walks with us in the circumstances of our lot in life, instructing us through its common relations, and adapting it expressly to our spiritual necessities.

How many of us, who pretend to be Christians, have yet to learn that our common life is providential, that it contains, even in its most straitened conditions, occasions for the practice of an excellence greater than we have ever hoped to attain ? To live in connection with other men ; to labor for our own subsistence and their welfare ; to receive knowledge from living tongues and from the pages of books in which is treasured the best portion of many a great and good man's life ; to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached upon the Sabbath day from the sacred place, and through the week from the more sacred tribunal of conscience ; to be a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister, or a child ; to stand in the midst of a gloriously animated nature, which evermore appeals to the heart by silence, and storm, and grandeur, and beauty, and unity binding together a thousand forms of variety ; to feel, as we often must, that we sustain holy and elevat-

ing relations with beings who have passed through the valley that lies between this world and the world to come; to know, as the believing soul not seldom knows, that we dwell very near Him who made us and will never forget us;—this, all this, belongs to the life of the humblest soul upon earth. And is there nothing inspiring in such a lot? Can that condition be rightly named common or profitless which touches upon everything great and glorious in the universe? Can those duties be pronounced burdensome which are the conditions and proofs of our brotherhood to man, and our discipleship of Christ, and our dependence upon God? If to nourish this wondrously gifted soul with wisdom be not a noble employment, where shall we find one nobler? If to pray to an Infinite Love be not a privilege, who shall tell us of a greater? If to imitate Him whose “tender mercies are over all his works,” and, like his Son, to “go about doing good,” be an occupation too spiritless and mean for our aspiring souls, where shall we find one more interesting or more elevated? What would we have instead of that common lot which is given to all? It is not enough that we are made in the image of the Most High, and that, by righteous living, all things in this life and futurity may be ours. We must have that wealth which often torments in the getting, and plagues in the possession, and flies away from us when the footfall of the angel of death is heard upon our threshold. We grow discontented in the society of nature, and common men, and our own souls, and the



spirit of God ! We must live where life puts on a fine outside, and trifles away the days, and reels carelessly down to the awful close of earthly things. It is not honor enough to be a son of the most high God, and a brother of the Lord Jesus Christ ! We would be presidents, and kings, and wear titles, and hear the world call us great. O, brethren, may not your Master be walking with you, and talking in your ears along this road of your daily existence, and your "eyes be holden, that you do not see him ?" You are looking away from yourselves for happiness ; you are discontented with your lot ; it is dull and wearisome, this weekly round of duty. You long for such a position as you can conceive in your imagination ; and, dreaming of things impossible, know nothing of the richness and sanctity of that which lies about you. O, call in these vagrant fancies, and bid this fretting temper be quiet, and blow a cheering blast to rouse this lagging will, and open these eyes heavy with dreaming, and filled with such tears as only the foolish shed, and unstop these deaf ears, and behold thy Saviour at thy side, and listen to the heavenly words which flow from his lips, and own that *thou* alone art foolish, and dull, and unworthy of respect, and that thy *life* is divinely appointed. Yes, full of spiritual resources, wonderful in its mysterious relations, solemn in its warning voices, yet joyous and inspiring in its promises, is this our daily existence. It is our journey to Emmaus, where the Lord goes along with us, and "talks to us by the way."

Can you not understand this sacredness of life, as a whole, of which I have now spoken? Then contemplate it in its parts. Let me take you by the hand, and lead you into your own house, and tell you how, through the relations of home and domestic life, your Lord speaks daily to your deaf ears, and hourly walks before your beiled eyes.

Look around this little circle. There are the father and mother, to whom you owe your life. Their hearts are bound up in you; they have sacrificed pleasure, gain, everything for your sake; they have watched when their eyes were heavily drooping to sleep, have toiled when they were weary, have borne things almost beyond human endurance, even may have gone wrong and perilled their own souls, in their love for you. There is your wife; has she not chosen you out of all the world, and clung to you through "evil report and good report," and rejoiced with you in your joy, and generously taken upon herself your sorrows, and loved you when you did not deserve to be loved, and faithfully counselled you in your uncertainty, and protected your children?—or, if she has not done this, are you sure that you are not at fault, and have not broken her spirit, or turned her heart's best affections dearly back upon themselves by your unkindness? There is your husband, who for you encounters hardship, and often gives up his own pleasure for your slightest wish. There are brother and sister, your first companions, part of your life. There is your child, helpless, lov-

ing, wayward, appealing to you for strength and guidance along the perilous way from youth to manhood. Or, if all these are not here, yet this is the centre of their love, and here they often come, and fill your rooms with mirth and joy. Or, it may be, some have passed through that door never to return in the flesh; yet their going away has hallowed the walls of your home as their staying never could; and sometimes, when the curtains are drawn, and the night has fallen upon the world, and laugh and merry talk around the fireside have glided off into a sweet and pensive silence, the name of the departed is spoken in a low tone, and you know by the sudden awe and love that spread from soul to soul that one sits there invisible. This is your home; and, now, what hinders that Jesus Christ should come and dwell in the house with you? Is there unkindness, or anger, or petulance, or selfishness there? Ah, these bar the doors against him; but these alone; for if love, and forbearance, and piety, and humility are there, he will come, though the house be never so narrow. If the walls are *not* hung with purple, he will sit there, and talk with you of his Father's kingdom. If the table hold only a crust of bread and a cup of water, his blessed hands shall be outstretched above it, and call down the favor of Heaven. If sorrow and death invade you, he will open the holy book and read, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." My brother, into this home

cometh Christ Jesus every day, and speaketh to thee through a father's care and a mother's love, through the tenderness of wedded affection, and the confidence of a sister's heart, and the pleading face of childhood; through talks around the fireside, and gatherings about the board of the divine bounty; through change, and birth, and death, and hopes that, cradled in an infant's bed, go out and range through infinity, to repose at last at the feet of God. Not alone blessed were those disciples who said to their Lord, "Abide with us," and at whose table he sat when their "eyes were opened;" but we are invited every day by the same illustrious guest, and our eyes are yet sealed!

And in a still more intimate sense, and in closer resemblance to the occurrence from which our reflections have arisen, does our Lord walk unrecognized by our side, in the ordination of labor, difficulty, and sorrow. In the passages of life which are darkest with the shadow of these clouds, our Master is especially near us, and we, too often, farther away in heart than ever from him.

Where is the man who does not often complain of work as a curse? How often do our bodies move mechanically towards our duty, while our souls long to shake off their obligation to a task-master so inexorable? We would not be deprived of the results of labor; oh, no! these would we all secure in our own person, and without being entirely undeserving of them; but we wish they might come to us by an easier route. We grudge the long process

which leads to a distant good, the patient delving against obstacles, the work that is performed from a sense of duty alone. Like an enchanter would we stand in the midst of our materials, and by our potent voice call into existence beautiful and great creations. And when, because of our indolence, the mighty fruition of our hopes is delayed, and our weakness drags after it embarrassment and confusion, and work accumulates and threatens, we complain still more. "This is a great hardship," we say, "that Providence should so encumber us with difficulties." We try to avoid them, to invent spiritual "labor-saving machines;" we rave, or go mad, or let fall our hands in despair, anything but encounter the difficulty. And at last the crisis comes, and we groan under the retribution of our wasted energies, and it seems to us that the way back to peace is forever blocked up; or, perchance, without any very perceptible neglect of duty in us, a storm swiftly rises out of a clear horizon, and darkens at mid-day the sun that arose and travelled up to the zenith so propitiously. And, then, we certainly are privileged to act as if God were our enemy and tyrant! In all these situations — in labor, difficulty, retribution, or affliction — are we looking afar off for help, as sad and confused as the disciples when they believed that impious hands had borne away the body of their Lord.

Yet, even while those desponding ones mourned their great deprivation, Jesus himself walked in the way with them. And so, in our periods of doubt and trial, does

our Saviour come to our aid. Yea, this very labor, what is it but the constant call to noble effort,—the voice of Christ, now urging and now cheering us on to new attainments? And what is this difficulty which accompanies every great accomplishment, but a sharp defiance which should kindle our zeal, and bring us on armed at all points for the onset? Is it not the proof by which the “Captain of our salvation” would test the worth of us who claim the right to follow his standard? And if we are weak enough to fear this, how can our Lord entreat us better than to send a scourging retribution, which shall crush our pride or awaken us from sloth? Or are we always in the best way when *we* think so? May not one above us in mercy wish to avert the evil consequences of our false security while yet they are afar off? Yes, labor, difficulty, retribution and sorrow are only the varied manifestations of our Master’s love, that love which can look on in complacency when we suffer, but turns away its face in sadness when we sin; which cares, above all things, to present us, made perfect through generous and severe discipline, at the throne of God. So does our Lord go with us through these dark places of life; yea, he creates the darkness, that within its shadows we may call to him to come and lead us.

So does Jesus walk with us, and talk to us “by the way,” in all the relations of our life. O, never is he absent; for when we call upon him he is with us, and when we would go away from him, our midnight darkness

is only the shadow of his receding love. And our souls testify to this divine presence. Abroad with nature, or amid crowds of men, within our own home, accompanied by friends, or alone upon our bed at night, in joy and sorrow, our "hearts burn within us," and tell us the Lord is near. And what is this burning of the heart but the divine response of the godlike within to the God without,— the demand for an eternal reünion of our perverted nature to the favor of its Maker? And who are we, and what are we doing, that we heed it not? O, mournful the blindness of those whose "eyes are holden" through a long life, and go down towards the evening of death not knowing that a celestial presence accompanieth their steps! O, joyful the lot of those who say to him who goeth along with them, "Abide with us!" for their eyes shall be opened, and they shall see the Lord Jesus Christ, risen indeed, and standing in their midst, and their walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus shall be a journey from earth to heaven.

XXI.

OUR FRIENDS AND OUR SAVIOUR.

“My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it.”—LUKE 8: 21.

THE mother and brethren of Jesus, on one occasion, attempted to come near him, but could not, on account of the throng. “It was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee.” Jesus, seizing this opportunity to enforce an important truth, “answered and said, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it.”

By these words the Saviour defined the nature and conditions of affection. It depends upon spiritual relationship rather than ties of blood. The woman who had given him birth, and her offspring, were not necessarily his mother and brethren, but those who had most faithfully listened to and practised the truth he taught, and were, therefore, in a similar condition of mind. And what was true of him is true of us. Our best friends are those who most truly agree with us in spirit. They may or may not be members of our own family, but in either case they are our natural relations; and if we are what we ought to

be, the conditions of friendship with us will be the same as with Jesus; we shall love best those who "hear the word of God and do it."

It cannot be doubted, by a mind instructed in Christian truth, that love for Jesus Christ is the highest sentiment of which we are capable towards one partaking of our human nature, and is second in dignity only to the love of God. By love for the Saviour I do not mean that half animal, half spiritual madness, the offspring of religious sentimentalism and passion, which so often disgusts serious minds, in the ignorant and fanatical. I mean that affection which grows upon us as we know more of life, and test more fully the insufficiency of human love; and, fixing our soul upon an ideal excellence, are everywhere upon earth mocked and baffled in our chief desire, so that we are driven from one home of our hearts to another, until we repose upon that wondrous nature, half human, half divine, which answers to all our needs, resolves every doubt, inspires with immortal hopes, and, while enfolding us with more than woman's tenderness, gives a strength whereby we lift ourselves to the sublime thought of God and consecration to His service. In this love for Jesus our human loves culminate, deriving thence their own beauty and endurance, and in turn interpreting to us the grandeur of what transcends themselves. And the surest test of character is the presence of this engrossing reverence and affection for Christ, the image of God, holding other special regards as tributary, and inspiring that uni-

versal benevolence without which love is only the most intense form of human selfishness.

It is not to be supposed that the mass of men and women will at once comprehend a doctrine like this, which may appear to them so like an abstraction of religious philosophy. All the great facts of the religious life are abstractions to such persons. But they are blessed realities to those who, by consecration to God and the performance of duty, have risen to their comprehension. If there are few souls who thus love our Lord Jesus Christ, it is because there are few souls pure, strong, vast, and clear enough to accept that divine affection offered by him. For us who are blinded, depraved, enfeebled, and narrowed by ignorance and sin, there is but one way of attaining it, the way pointed out by him when he said, "*My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it.*" Obedience to conscience, the diligent and constant improvement of our faculties, and the thankful reception of the beautiful gifts of Heaven, will gradually lead us to where we shall begin to comprehend that to be loved by Jesus Christ is better than the favor of the whole world, and is the condition of love to God.

But while the living a religious life is, in general terms, the condition upon which we become capable of love to Jesus Christ, there are portions of our human experience which seem peculiarly adapted to produce this result. Our affection for our fellow-beings constitutes much of the discipline and happiness of our earthly existence, by its

varied forms educating and developing our spirits. I do not say that the only use and legitimate result of these experiences of human love is to lead us to the love of Jesus Christ; for affection is good independent of any use — is life itself. But certainly one result and important use of our earthly attachments is to prepare us for this great union with our Saviour,—a union more complete and sacred than that of parent with child, brother with sister, friend with friend, or husband with wife,—including what is permanent in these, and rising far above them all into the awful region of the one love, unchangeable and infinite.

True affection depends upon appreciation of the beloved. It is impossible to love what we do not know; and consciously or unconsciously our attachments keep pace with our insight. We may consent that a portion of the nature shall be wrapped in mystery; but there must be enough open to us to make love intelligent, else we only worship a picture of our own fancy. Jesus Christ must be known better than most of us know him to be regarded with that sentiment he claims from his disciples. But how is such knowledge to be obtained? How are we to rise from our unspiritual lives to the appreciation of the loftiest nature that ever dwelt in the flesh? This is an achievement far above our ordinary efforts. It is easy to overlook a garden from our windows, and take in its beauties in detail and as a whole; but the Alps are to be known only after we have looked from a thousand points, toiled up steep summits,

descended into fearful ravines, walked along the edge of glaciers, seen the sunrise, the sunset, the mist and the storm, and wearily gone over and around their vast area. Then we can recall the stupendous scene in all its glory and beauty. Even so, compared with our common estimates of men, must be our appreciation of him who is the ideal of the human, because the image of the divine.

We must, therefore, be content to come by slow degrees to that knowledge of Jesus which precedes a worthy love. We must learn the beauty and excellence of the different elements of his nature, by long acquaintance and minute information, before we can hold in imagination the figure in its colossal symmetry. And here our human attachments come to our aid. Introducing us to various exalted qualities in character, and arousing the unappeasable desire for an ideal excellence, they prepare us at length for just appreciation and sympathy with our Lord and Saviour.

We may not always be aware that each of our earthly friends sustains a peculiar relation to us which no other human spirit can usurp. And perhaps the secret cause of their attraction is their power to satisfy some desire of ours. We long for an answering voice to the deepest yearnings of our hearts, and though we cannot define what it is that makes us restless and at odds with life, the coming of a new friend solves the problem by supplying that special need. It is vain to look to friends for more than this, since no human soul will entirely content our own

forever, for the simple reason that our craving for love is infinite, and there is only one Infinite Being. Therefore, every attachment short of the love of God must be incomplete, answering only to a portion of our nature. Yet so strangely are we constituted that, for the time, a human heart seems all in all to us. We are drawn to the friend who can represent but a small part of the excellence of humanity as strongly as if he were its perfect incarnation, and are held there till something greater and better, or at least different, claims our homage. So it is that our real friends are those who stand to us for real elements of the Christian character, and the result of their personal attraction is to bring us into nearer communion with the facts of which they are the impersonation.

And God gives friends to be our instructors, if we sincerely desire to do his will. At one time we are in mental doubt, weakness, and confusion; with faculties all alive, we stand before the veiled land of knowledge, uncertain where we shall go, appalled by its mysteries, too irresolute to move on, and too proud to turn back. Then, when it seems to us that life is worthless without wisdom, some friend appears, whom we instinctively recognize as the guide and master of our intellect. It is of little consequence whether he consciously assumes the position of teacher, or we of scholar,—perhaps better that it should not be thus; but he pours into our mind the living force of his own, clears up our doubts, inspires courage, teaches us to use our powers, shames our despondency, and

concentrates our energies, and it becomes our noblest ambition to follow him out into this wild, weary tract of thought; we live in his genius, and through him first does truth become a reality.

But he is not enough for us. Our mental confusion partially disappears, and we become more self-reliant and sure of ourselves. We can look with hope and satisfaction upon questions which once overwhelmed us with difficulties; and a new desire faintly stirs with us, gaining strength with our efforts to repress it, till the intense gaze of our whole nature seems concentrated upon this blank space in our horizon. It is not enough now that we know the truth; we would comprehend the beauty of things. A painful sense of discord steals into our studies; life seems made of conflicting elements, and nowhere do we see the forming hand that shall mould them to unity. Then comes our new friend, the man who looks upon all things through the poet's eyes. Flowers spring along his steps, and beauty attends like a familiar companion. While he talks, life reërranges itself; its joys gleam again with the flush of youth; its sorrows retire into the mellow light of the background; its duties and heroic efforts tower like mountains on the horizon line aloft, and the strange, incongruous scene is changed to a picture enfolded by a radiant atmosphere, not of the earth. In the person of this friend we learn to value the sense of harmony and fitness, to abhor the unseemly and incomplete, and understand that beauty is the native garb of truth. And in his

winning, graceful spirit, we, unknown to ourselves, do homage to that Infinite Beauty of which he is a partial impersonation.

But we were not made to be perpetual listeners and admirers; and by-and-by the desire to give out of our own treasures appears. But we cannot talk to these every-day companions; our lips are dumb, and our words stiff and cold, and only provoke the contempt of those who hear, till, on a fortunate day, we are brought alongside of one who unseals our frozen spirit, and to whom it flows out in free and rejoicing speech. To this soul we can talk all day and all night; in its bracing air our mind never tires; while it listens, thoughts range themselves like marshalled troops, and figures come without the calling, and power from deep places wells up into our words, and the rhythm of the theme sings itself into our ears. It is not that our friend talks, only comprehends, and with spirit close alongside our own, tempts out into a free life what before could only hide its bashful head in secret chambers of the heart. And this soul teaches us freedom, and first makes us know and respect ourselves.

And then comes the one who first reveals the meaning of the saying, "He who loveth not knoweth not God;" the one who can love us, whose affection can stoop to our common wants, or rise to the altitude of our grandest thought; who can be at once the sunshine in our pleasure and the arm of strength in our weariness and gloom; who seems to us, we know not why, altogether lovely. And

we go to this spirit as the river flows down into the generous sea. We pledge vows of eternal affection, and perhaps before men declare it to be the one whom we prefer out of all the world, to be our constant friend. And this is well and beautiful; for so much above all other things is love, that its divine mysteries can only be comprehended by this interlinking of soul with soul in the perfect union of sense and spirit; and through such union, if we are apt to be taught, do we learn the reality of love, and awake to the life in Christ and God.

And beyond these personal friends there are men and women whom we love with a calmer and more spiritual affection, because they are away from our immediate presence, and more purely represent ideas; — the poet, whose song, a century old, is sung to-day by our own heart, whose piercing eyes we should fear to meet, so entirely do his words describe us; the statesman, who is justice and power ruling discord, whose name, read in history or heard in oration, is a law to our reverence; the preacher, who seems with his wide and deep insight to be indeed the minister of God, for his rebukes bring us upon our knees, his cheering assurances inspire our hopes, and in his speech and life the kingdom of God has come again with power; and, with these, that crowd of great and good men who claim our reverence from their places in history, and to whom we appeal in vindication of our common humanity; and above all are those who were nearest to us while they lived, but have now put on immortality, — who, abid-

ing with us upon earth, made it a dwelling-place we would not have exchanged for any heaven, reconciling its discords, and sanctifying its lowest uses by endearing associations, and by passing away have been born again to us, so that their humanity seems lost in the glory of their higher life, whence they look, through calm, clear eyes, down upon us, wandering, weak, and faithless below. Thus are we surrounded with friends, personal and ideal, who present to us, phase by phase, this human nature of ours, and compel us to acknowledge the worth of every element of the perfect character, while they forbid us to repose in themselves, and all, with reverent faces, look upward to our elder brother and Lord.

For we must have had small experience if we think any of these friends sufficient for our utmost need. Drawn to us by our partial and temporary wants, they can only serve us as far and as long as God appoints. Perhaps some of them are to be our companions forever; yet through what changes of relationship we are to pass, it were impossible to predict. But this is evident, that no human soul can entirely respond to ours, and we feel this most surely when receiving the best gifts of affection. For, if our friend is all-sufficient, why do we crave other and different mates? Because he cannot be all-sufficient; and, though he compels our attention in his presence, his absence reveals too plainly what he is not. The holiest relation upon earth is no exception to this truth. Husband and wife cannot be the whole universe to each other; they

may be dear and excellent beyond estimation, while they act along with nature, humanity, literature, labor, life and God; for these are always ready to supply our needs, and we cheat ourselves into the belief that we are receiving from one spirit what comes in so great degree from them. Indeed, were it possible for two souls to be sequestered from these influences, the result would be mutual destruction, and the sorrowful experience of irreligious men and women, who dream that they can continue to love each other without loving God and all the good and beautiful things He has made, is a refutation to that sentimental blasphemy which exalts the creature to the place of the Creator. No; we cannot be satisfied with human love. Our desires outstrip its capacity, and, ministered to by all its constancy and tenderness, we cry out in weariness for that which is greater,—for one soul to gather in the scattered rays of perfection which here and there have dazzled our eyes, and pour full upon us the light of a celestial life.

Thus are we prepared by what our friends do, and what they cannot do, for the appreciation of the character of our Lord Jesus Christ. For, by long experience of the worth of the elements of a complete nature, known in separate individuals, we are trained to reverence for their higher manifestations in him; and, by the very unrest and dissatisfaction which come at the end of human sympathy, we are inspired with a longing for an ideal friendship, in which we may securely repose. And while sur-

veying in detail these human excellences and graces, the wish is born to see them united ; and at last the desire of our hearts is to know one being who is all, and more than all, the world can be,— whose nature is poised by the balance of opposite qualities ; who is strong and gentle, wise and childlike ; whom we can love down to the depths of our being without tumult or danger, and can respect without fear ; who can know us entirely in our weakness and strength, and yet enfold us in unfailing compassion ; who may be the type of that infinite love which we are yet too low and ignorant to comprehend.

And, blessed be God, in mercy to our mortal infirmity He has given to us and all mankind one such friend,— that being whose thought includes the wisdom of men, whose life is the world's only true poem, whose holiness transcends the ideal of the race, and whose nature, whether human or divine, is yet a vast unexplored land of wonder, — our brother, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, is that perfect friend. For did ever man, or woman, or little child, come to him in vain ? Stronger than manly power, more gentle than woman's heart, more simple than childhood's faith, he gives to each from his abundance, and turns no one away. And did life ever bring that condition with which he could not have sympathy ? The poor man is his friend ; the sinner is the brother of him who knew temptation ; the ignorant is not despised by him who veiled his face before the infinite wisdom ; the desponding leans upon him who knew the agony of Gethsemane ;

the unloved may claim him who was crucified by a world that knew him not; and all the power, the inspiration, the zeal, and the devotion of life's highest hours is mirrored in that spirit whose ministry was the turning-point in the life of humanity. And when we come nearer our own souls, and think of their myriad wants, how entirely do they all find satisfaction in that mighty soul of his. We have only to study his character and words, and do the will of God, and, as we go on through our earthly existence, those words will be ever opening into new depths of meaning, and that character, seen from changing points, will become more complete and sufficing. The noblest men have found in him more excellence than they could understand, and a better sympathy than they could imagine; and every religious mind will joyfully respond to the truth, that he remains the one incomparable friend, because the one in whom the ideal has alone appeared in the flesh.

Thus are we instructed by our earthly friends into the appreciation and love of Jesus Christ. And when he is truly ours, we better know and love those who have led us to him; for then we cease to demand perfection in finite minds, or satisfaction in human love, and with gratitude accept what these can give, knowing that above them all is our final home. And, more than this, our Saviour's love is the reconciling point between man and God; for we look down from it upon a glorified humanity, and upward to the great good Father. So are we led up this

mount of ascension. When we are children, parent, brother and sister, guide us a little way along the base; early manhood finds us clambering up its sides; and one friend after another throws an arm around us, and a few there may be who go all the way, singing as we move on. And these lead us up a winding path, around sudden corners, whence the landscape is seen far off below, now resting a moment upon a grassy upland, or leaning against a wall of rock. Old guides shake our hand and depart, and new ones, with beaming faces, await us. And if we tire not, and are true to them and to ourselves, we reach at last the summit, and there is our Lord`Jesus Christ; and, holding by his white robes, we look down upon the wide expanse of earth, while far away along the horizon kindles the dawning glory of an Immortal Love.

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